

TOP STORY: DID IRAQ REALLY PLOT TO ASSASSINATE GEORGE BUSH?

August 9 - 22, 1993

# In THESE TIMES

the alternative newsmagazine

## POLITICAL CHILD ABUSE

How and why  
kids have  
become  
politicians'  
favorite  
pawns

**David Futrelle**

page 14

**Mike Males**

page 18

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INSLAW BREAKERS, PAGE 12



# EDITORIAL

## SAVE OUR PRESIDENT

**C**an Bill Clinton be saved—or save himself—from his drift to the right and his descent in popular support? Democrats who console themselves by muttering “at least he’s better than Bush” should realize that won’t persuade many swing voters in future elections. Nor is it enough to count on Republican disarray or to hope that the economy will turn the corner in time for mid-term voting.

Even for his own sake, Clinton needs strong pressure from the left—that is, from self-described liberals, populists and progressives—to at least practice what he preached on the campaign trail. That includes returning to his initial strategic wisdom, now muddled, that job creation and health care reform must take precedent over prickly social issues. If Clinton had solidified his support on economic and health care policies, he would have had political capital to expend on social issues—such as removing the ban on gays in the military, where his soundly principled position was ineptly pursued.

Conservative pressures are strong and entrenched. They include pulls from key Clinton advisers (multimillionaires Robert Rubin and Lloyd Bentsen, in particular) and Democratic congressional leaders. (Sens. David Boren and Sam Nunn leap to mind.) Republicans, sniffing blood, remain united in attack. Business groups rely not only on the power of the purse with the Democratic Party and the threat of Wall Street disapproval but also on vigorous lobbying, including manufactured grass-roots—or astroturf—protests.

Clinton does not need liberals’ private handwringing or closed-door strategizing with the administration on what new compromises to make. He needs to hear that people want him to use government to spur growth and create jobs (putting deficit reduction in second place), to provide health care that is both comprehensive and secure, to clean special-interest forces out of government, to force the rich to pay their share and the corporations to show responsibility to society. He needs to hear that they want military spending shifted to education and public investment, including building a new, energy-efficient, environmentally sound infrastructure.

Clinton could have—and should have—used his power-

ful position to explain these positions, argue forcefully for them, and ask the American people to help him. His best hope for winning legislatively was to organize the American public to pressure Congress. Even a broad-based energy tax could have been sold if he had linked it more clearly to new public investment in energy-efficient transportation (including better cars) and other technologies.

The way Clinton’s proposals are shaping up, it would be hard now for him to take them to Main Street or the factory gate and win much support. He arbitrarily ruled out a single-payer, Canadian-style approach to

national health insurance from the beginning, out of fear that such a proposal would look like “government health care” and “higher taxes.” Now he seems likely to propose a plan that will be a hard sell to the American people simply because of its complexity. There is a good chance that many middle-class voters will think they are paying more and getting less. Yet without a strong popular voice for national health insurance, the insurance industry will nibble his plans to death.

Also, having promised tough protection for labor standards and the environment as preconditions for approval of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), Clinton is expected to propose a toothless mechanism for imposing fines—but no trade sanctions. A vigorous, broad-based campaign against NAFTA in its present form stands a good chance of sending negotiators back to the table.

Clinton needs a clamor from his left, whether or not he wants one. Beyond simply reminding him of the right thing to do, organized demands from his left enable Clinton to tell conservative advisers and lobbyists that he simply has to respond to this constituency. He gains at the least a bargaining chip.

Instead of portraying the quiet on Clinton’s left as evidence that popular opinion is to his right, the media might end up portraying liberal agitation as a demonstration that Clinton must move left to satisfy voters. In any case, progressive groups should be busily shaping public opinion, not leaving that job to the president and the media.

Clinton deserves blame for failing to muster the American public behind his ideas. But those on the liberal-to-left flank of American politics have failed Clinton. They should not quietly go along with him or simply hope to be at the table when deals are cut. Instead, they should take inspiration from peace organizations that effectively campaigned to stop resumption of underground nuclear tests.

This does not mean that the Democratic left should be attacking Clinton. Rather, it should create a counterbalance to conservatism, helping to save Clinton from himself by organizing people to demand to the president and to Congress that they indeed “put people first.” ◀

## IN THESE TIMES

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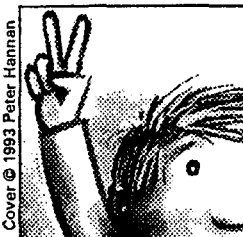
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# LETTERS

## Unacceptable

The general tone of *In These Times* toward the Clinton administration is unacceptable. It is one thing to present criticism constructively; it is another to do it as though this administration were the enemy.

We had the enemy in place for 12 years; are you confused, or is it force of habit? Do you have to picture Clinton on your cover of July 12 as a juvenile hayseed, a rube with an overbite? Does John Judis, even if accurate, have to be so completely negative, so totally destructive of Clinton's efforts?

Is there no realization of what Clinton is up against? How about Dole, the lugubrious and sinister Dole, the darling of the military-industrial complex, who is in a permanent rage at not

being president and continually seeks new ways to sabotage anything Clinton attempts or achieves? Can you treat him to some acid rain too?

Even *The Nation*, which is as unkind to Clinton as you are, knows that *Dole* is the target, not Clinton.

Do you want Republicans back in '96? Clinton's not far enough left for you?

As an elderly leftie, I'll make do with young Mr. Clinton at this point.

George Gaynes  
Santa Barbara, Calif.

## Knight moves

I am writing in regards to the article "Putting people last," as well as the reply to Mr. Gergen (*ITT*, June 28 and July 12).

I recall the same complaining from the left during Carter's presidency. (I did it too!) The loss of support and drift to Anderson preceded the hell of 12 Republican years.

Listen! Bill Clinton is our knight in shining armor. Unlike dream candidates that we all love, this one gets elected, can raise money to get elected and does get some things done.

Imagine George Bush filling the Supreme Court some more.

Stick with your man. It will be easier to prod him to goodness as a lame duck than it will be to get anything but war on the vulnerable from the likes of Bob Dole or William Bennett.

The modern Mussolinis are reaching out from the grave. Let us kick dirt on them. Bill Clinton *can* save us.

S. Baba  
Salt Lake City, Utah

## A little hope

Your publication is one of the few I've counted on to bring me fresh-aired journalism when most media was a smokescreen.

But I wouldn't be honest if I didn't tell you I'm offended at your attacks on Clinton. What you say may be true, but there's a lot you don't say that is also true. I'd like to see *In These Times* give support and recognition for efforts by the president to hold our country together.

If liberals cut him down, then what?

SYLVIA

by Nicole Hollander





Dole or Perot? Don't help destroy what could be a little hope, please.

Ava Dale Johnson  
St. Paul, Minn.

## Made in the USA?

In your May 31 issue, John Judis reported that U.S. electronics firms are holding their own in the struggle against their Japanese competitors. For years he has complained that Japanese electronics firms were trying to control the world, which he thinks is definitely a *bad thing*. Now he retracts everything he wrote previously about the subject, and reports that U.S. electronics firms have held onto world domination, which is apparently a *good thing*.

Is it really a good thing for U.S. workers? Judis specifically cites the domination of U.S. firms like Hewlett Packard in printers. The Hewlett Packard DeskJet 550C printer on my desk was made in Singapore, where Hewlett Packard has a big operation. Judis does not mention where U.S. firms locate their plants—or the wages and working conditions in Singapore. His article was entitled

Lee Baxandall, *l'écrivain au naturel*.

"America boots up," but a more appropriate title would be "HP boots up in Singapore."

What would a computer cost if the workers who made it were paid a living wage? That is the question that *In These Times* ought to be asking, if it really aims to be an alternative newspaper.

John W. Farley  
Henderson, Nev.

## Power outage

I enjoyed much of Helen Fisher's essay on the history of gender and power (*ITT*, May 31). However, I was disturbed to read, in an article purporting to explore the issue of unequal power relationships, that "working women [and] all of the singles ... buy a host of services" which are described as including "day care and take-out restaurants."

Why don't working *men* or working *families* spend their money on these services? It would seem from Fisher's language that only *single* men need worry about who will take care of their children or put dinner on the table. Married men seem to have a live-in assistant who freely spends her money to decorate the house, buy pizza and provide child care—never

mind that these men wouldn't know which end of a plow to grab.

In her sidebar "Are men born with power?" Fisher expresses her tentative support of the theory that men seek and hold more positions of authority than do women because they have higher, unmasked (by estrogen) levels of testosterone and serotonin. According to the theory, different levels of chemicals in the bodies and brains of women and men provide a biological explanation for what Fisher calls an "enormous gender difference in who seeks and obtains political rank."

As I, like Fisher, am "one who takes science seriously," this scientific claim leads me to ask: Do African-American men have lower testosterone and serotonin levels than do Caucasian men? Do Latin American men? Men with disabilities? Short men? This biological thing could really be a breakthrough for all those people who are losing sleep over how to change the power structures and social intolerance that they mistakenly think are at the root of all this inequality.

Laura A. Clark  
Managua, Nicaragua

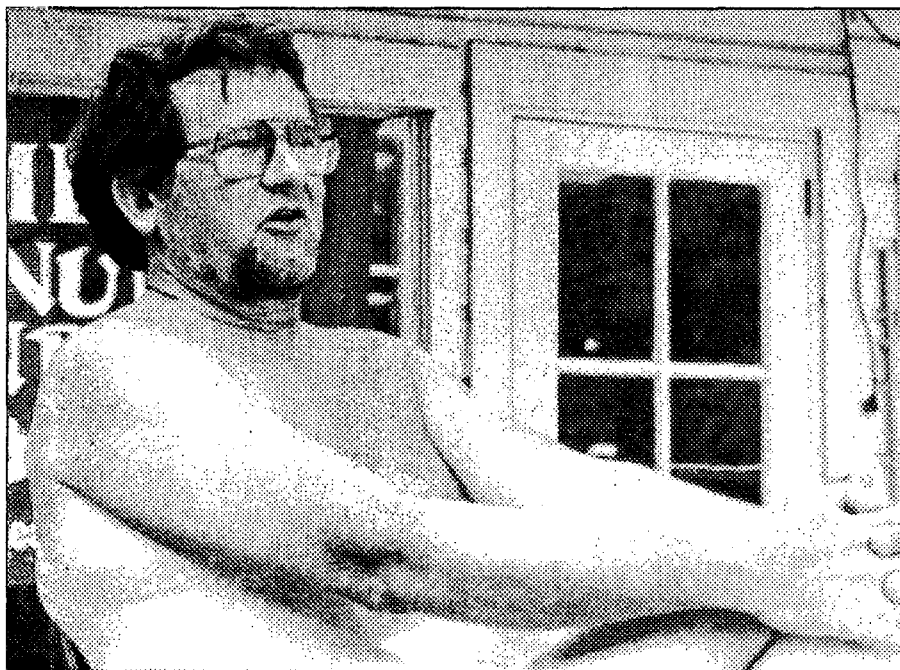
## The bare facts

I see by the T-shirt ad in the July 12 *In These Times* that Joel Bleifuss is a naked person who is involved in a cover-up. This is one of your readers who refuses the cover-up.

Lee Baxandall  
Editor, *N: Nude & Natural Magazine*  
Oshkosh, Wis.

*Editor's note: And we thought Oshkosh was the home of overalls!*

*Editor's note: Please try to keep letters under 250 words in length. Otherwise we may have to make drastic cuts, which may change what you wished to say. Also, if possible, please type and double-space letters—or at least write clearly and with wide margins.*



# IN SHORT



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## NUCLEAR NIGHTMARE

*Community groups nationwide fight high-level waste schemes*

the high-level radioactive waste—25,900 tons of which have already been generated. This spring in Michigan, the government spearheaded a move to buy more time that has left many concerned about dangers down the road.

On April 7, a controversial new canister designed to temporarily store radioactive waste, the ventilated storage cask (VSC-24), was added to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's (NRC) list of approved containers. For the Palisades Nuclear Plant near South Haven, Mich., the NRC's approval—which did not allow for public review and did not require an environmental impact statement—came not a moment too soon. With its underground stor-

The Atomic Energy Act of 1954 gave the federal government jurisdiction over atomic power. But after 40 years of licensing hundreds of nuclear reactors in the U.S., the Department of Energy (DOE) has yet to find a safe way to dispose of



## APPALL-O-METER

The In These Times index of life's little indecencies.

By Woody Igou

### Will spy for food

CIA Director James Woolsey spent a week cajoling and whining to members of Con-



gress to prevent a \$1 billion reduction in the agency's \$28 billion budget, claiming that

even a spending freeze would be a "bare-bones budget."

Amazingly, he lost.

At least *Chicken Little* didn't ask for cash.

### Pot calls kettle black

The Vatican recently released a warning on the pagan aspects of feminism, urging American bishops to combat "bitter ideological" feminism among American Catholic women that, the Pope said,



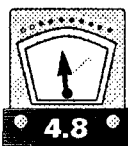
would lead to "forms of nature worship in the celebration of myths and symbols,

usurping the traditional celebrations of the Christian faith." The Pope further noted that these activities could "take the place of the worship of God revealed in Jesus Christ."

Now a Catholic woman can choose to be a witch in addition to the previous options of virgin and whore.

## Law and (money) order

Abraham Sofaer, a former State Department legal adviser for both the Reagan and Bush administrations, was recently retained by the Libyan government to defend criminal and civil cases arising from the Pan Am bombing over



Scotland in 1988. Sofaer, who worked on the trade embargo against Libya

and the bombing raid against Libya, reacted to those questioning the conflict of interest by stating, "I don't know what they are so excited about." No doubt about it, Reagan had the right man for the job.

## Corporate grass roots

The *New York Times* reports that the Coalition For Equal Access To Medicines, which described itself as an "ad hoc volunteer organization" composed of poor people, minority members and public health



advocates, was actually created and financed by the prescription drug industry.

Members of

Congress were unaware that the coalition was organized with the help of APCO Association, a Washington lobbying firm.

*Like the spontaneous generation of maggots out of spoiled meat.*

## APPALL-O-METER SCALE

1. Weightless banality
2. Green Acres stupid
3. Malicious cretinism
4. Howard Sternesque
5. Mary Matalin mean
6. Gangrenous venality
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8. A cancer in the Zeitgeist
9. Et tu, Pol Pot?
10. Horseperson of the Apocalypse

age pools filled to capacity, Palisades needed a place to put its irradiated fuel rods by May 7 in order to meet a refueling deadline and keep operating.

Opponents of the new "dry cask" plan, including Michigan Attorney General Frank Kelley and numerous environmental groups, argue that the cement-and-steel casks, each of which will hold 240 times the radioactivity of the Hiroshima bomb, might be of substandard quality since they have never been tested outdoors, were constructed prior to NRC approval and cost five times less than competing models. Because the cask is designed to last a maximum of only 40 years, the waste will most likely have to be handled at least three times, greatly increasing the risk of contamination.

But even more worrisome to many Great Lakes residents is the fact that potentially hundreds of 16-foot-tall casks are to be placed on a site described by the NRC itself as a "high-risk erosion critical sand dunes area" located only 150 yards from Lake Michigan (the main source of drinking water for 14 million people). Because a full assessment was not required, a five-page site "analysis" was all that was provided to the public.

"Environmental impact statements are usually at least an inch thick," says Bruce Johnson of the Lake Michigan Federation (LMF), one of the plaintiffs currently suing the NRC and Consumer's Power Company for approving the VSC-24 without public review. "Alternatives should have been addressed and analyzed. But instead they've made up the rules piece by piece. That is inadequate review under the National Environmental Policy Act. And that is the NRC abusing its powers of discretion."

In spite of the still-pending lawsuit, Consumer's Power began filling the casks at Palisades in May. Many environmentalists fear that the VSC-24 will soon be implemented nationwide as the cheapest short-term solution to the country's mounting nuclear waste crisis.

According to the NRC, half of the 109 operating reactors in the U.S. will run out of room in their storage pools during the next decade. Already, power plant officials from Arkansas, Wisconsin and Ohio have "toured" Palisades to look at the casks. And with the help of an NRC rule passed in 1990 that relaxed licensing requirements for high-level waste storage, it would seem that they, too, will be able to begin using canisters like the VSC-24—with little public intervention.

However, recent developments around the country signal a growing resistance to the "forced siting" principle that has guided DOE and NRC waste storage and disposal policy thus far. Some states have appointed or elected public service commissions and utility boards to regulate utilities beyond what is required on a federal level. In Wisconsin, for instance, the Point Beach Nuclear Plant near Green Bay has been hoping to implement the VSC-24. But before the utility could do so, it had to apply to the state's public service commission for approval. Because of the high costs involved, the commissioners demanded further study and the preparation of an environmental impact statement, both of which are currently underway.

In Minnesota, the Prairie Island Coalition Against Nuclear Storage (PICANS) claimed a major victory on June 8, when the Minnesota Court of Appeals decided that legislative authorization was required before Northern State Power Company could store high-level radioactive waste in as-yet-unapproved steel canisters on Prairie Island, a small island in the Mississippi River inhabited by the Mdewakanton Dakota community. PICANS organizers say the decision not only represents a shift to make the utility more accountable to the public; it also opens up "a window of opportunity" to reconsider the long-



term feasibility of nuclear energy.

It remains to be seen how the Minnesota Legislature will decide the Prairie Island case next year—or whether the power company will appeal the decision to the Supreme Court. PICANS Communications Director Bruce Drew says that his group plans to launch a large-scale grass-roots campaign to win their case, one which he believes will “pioneer this issue” for local communities fighting similar initiatives.

In Nevada, meanwhile, activists continue to fight the government’s attempts to open the world’s first permanent high-level radioactive waste dump. Bob Fulkerson, executive director of Citizen Alert in Reno, fears that the DOE is determined to build the Yucca Mountain dump to fulfill its 40-year-old promise to the nuclear industry to take the waste—in spite of an earthquake that shook the site in June 1992 and a 1993 state-sponsored report that said the buried waste would release unsafe quantities of radioactive carbon dioxide.

Of course, shutting down nuclear power plants is the ultimate goal of most groups working against both centralized and decentralized forced-siting initiatives. But some groups believe that it is better strategically to address specific storage and disposal concerns rather than condemn the entire nuclear industry, which has enormous political clout both locally and in Washington, D.C. “Lake Michigan Federation is neither pro- nor anti-nuclear,” says LMF attorney Bruce Johnson. “We’re pro-Lake Michigan.”

Others believe that the DOE will continue to look for the most politically vulnerable community—to site the waste as long as production continues. Trying to raise the debate above individual charges of “not in my back yard,” Mary Olson, who works on the Radioactive Waste Project at the Nuclear Information and Resource Service in Washington, D.C., urges people to challenge the NRC’s longstanding record as a cooperator with, rather than a regulator of, the nuclear industry. “The fundamental question is not on-site storage versus centralized disposal,” she said. “It is: who gets to make these decisions, and who are they accountable to.”

—Shea Dean

## A HEALTHY DEBATE

*Administration official faces single-payer health advocates*

ing the support of 3 million members, the populist Citizen Action network has been the leading grass-roots voice for national health insurance on the Canadian, single-payer model.

Magaziner has been crafting the still-unfinished administration proposal for “managed competition” among health plans purchased through regional “health alliances.” He told organizers gathered in Chicago in mid-July that “the places we differ are relatively small compared to where we agree.”

The rhetoric and many points of the plan as outlined by Magaziner did converge with what Citizen Action and other single-payer advocates have urged. But it was obvious from the tough questions and audience reaction that Magaziner has not yet won over the group.

“We need each other,” he told the meeting. “There are a lot of people in Washington and Congress who don’t want health care reform.”

“Get rid of them,” came a shout from the audience.

Ira Magaziner, the head of Hillary and Bill Clinton’s health care reform commission, came to the 20th Midwest Academy/Citizen Action convention with a plea. With 34 state organizations claim-

## MEDIA BEAT

By Pat Aufderheide

### The violent wasteland

“Due to some violent content, parental discretion advised.” A warning sticker—that’s all TV execs, worried about congressional ire, are willing to do to recognize that violent programs affect children. It may not seem like much, but it’s a major breakthrough in an industry that has steadfastly denied—in the face of decades of evidence—any anti-social consequences of TV violence.

But don’t fear that TV will suddenly become an oasis of peaceful play. TV officials have promised that non-gratuitous violence will endure. In what seems an unintentional admission of prime time’s desertification, CBS’s Howard Stringer said, “We don’t want to turn the vast wasteland into the dull wasteland.”

At a meeting this month, industry officials will decide the exact terms of the new warning system.

### All the news that fits

The *New York Times* loves the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)—just look at its editorial page. Its business section loves the trade treaty too, and has organized “a series of special advertorials” on its behalf. (“Advertorials” are discrete sections whose content—usually designed separately—harmonizes with the ads.) As a *Times* letter soliciting ads—obtained by watchdog group Public Citizen—explains, “many Americans require further understanding if they are to be supportive of free trade and anti-protectionism.” The



advertorials are intended to "educate the public and influence Washington decision makers." The *Times* doesn't want to confuse people, either. Opponents of the treaty, like the AFL-CIO and Public Citizen, have been shut out of the advertorial section. And so, as a letter circulated by prominent media scholars led by Todd Gitlin says, "The nation's most influential paper has transformed its editorial viewpoint into an advertising campaign, crowded out counter-arguments and skewed an important public debate."

### Public interest, '90s-style

It's official—home shopping via television is now in the public interest. (After all, it makes it much easier for the physically challenged to purchase zirconium jewelry.) That's what the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) decided when it recently ruled that cablers would have to put home-shopping channels on their systems. The "must-carry" provision had been designed for broadcasters who still perform old-fashioned gestures toward the "public interest, convenience and necessity" that justify their licenses—gestures such as news, public service announcements and community-oriented programming. The FCC ruling is already putting money into motion: the Home Shopping Channel, beset by allegations of corruption, is toying with a merger offer from rival QVC. Meanwhile, many public interest advocates see the ruling as an ominous precedent, further erosion of the meaning of the public interest as technologies change.

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"That's your job," Magaziner replied.

Citizen Action chairman Ira Arlook said that, much as Citizen Action would like to support the administration, Hillary Rodham Clinton "and others in the White House run the risk of proposing something we can't support." Some administration leaders think "we will have to support it because we have nowhere else to go," Arlook said. "This would be a serious, serious miscalculation."

Leaders of statewide affiliates and other Citizen Action organizers argued that they could persuade their members to back a plan only if, as Illinois Public Action director Robert Creamer said, "it will provide more benefits at lower cost" than what they have now. The only way to overcome insurance industry influence "is for the president to go over the head of Congress and mobilize intense support," Creamer argued.

For his part, Magaziner said that the administration was committed to seven principles that single-payer supporters shared: universal coverage, comprehensive benefits, affordability, accountability, improved access in now-underserved areas and reduced bureaucracy.

Cathy Hurwitt, Citizen Action's lead health care organizer, has had easy access to Magaziner, and the organization's pressure has helped shape the administration plan. Yet it's not clear others in the administration share Magaziner's conviction that the White House needs strong grass-roots support.

Even as it tries to influence the Clintons, Citizen Action is planning nationwide accountability sessions between citizens and members of Congress for early October. At these forums, the group plans to press for support of the American Health Security Act, introduced by Sen. Paul Wellstone (D-MN) and by Rep. Jim McDermott (D-WA). One-third of House Democrats have signed on as co-sponsors.

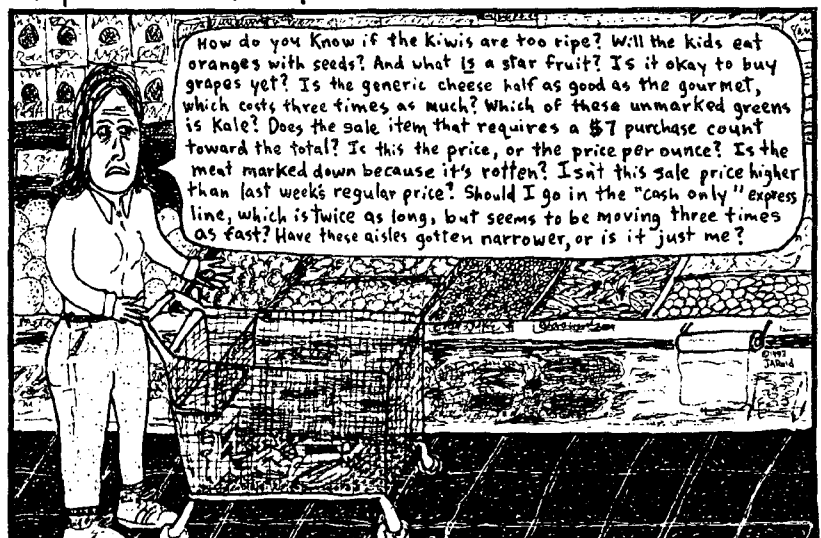
Wellstone, who also addressed the 1,200 convention delegates, urged the group to keep up the pressure. Failure could doom not only national health insurance but a broader national politics, Wellstone argued. "This is going to be an issue that centrally defines American politics."

—David Moberg

## ROUGH CUTS

By JA Reid

### Stupor Market Sweep





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## METEOR POWER

*Robert Townsend  
as superhero*

Robert Townsend doesn't enter a room; he bursts into one. He's an easy guy to like—he's got charisma, a smooth gait, a quick smile and an encyclopedic range

of voices and impressions that he can turn on and off.

The world is Townsend's stage; the material, whatever his frenetic imagination conjures. He's the '90s version of the "hyphenated American," though his designations are apt to read thus: director-actor-writer-comedian. Townsend is an avatar of the new black cinema, or Black New Wave—directors like Spike Lee, Keenan Ivory Wayans, John Singleton and Matty Rich, who insist on dramatizing highly personal stories about the dynamics and rhythms of African-American life. What separates them from their "blaxploitation"-era peers such as Michael Schultz or Gordon Parks is an entrepreneurial bent that serves to empower a guerrilla mentality.

His first film, *Hollywood Shuffle*, a 1987 satire about Hollywood's negative reinforcement of black stereotypes, Townsend financed with his credit cards. Townsend is now set to deliver a one-two punch, in the form of his fourth film, *The Meteor Man*, and his ambitious new variety show, *Townsend Television*, a blend of live action and film. Fox television has ordered 13 episodes.

Townsend, born in 1957, grew up in the dehumanizing war zones of Chicago's West Side, with a front-row perspective on decay and misery. But, sure

ETC.

By Miles Harvey

### The healthiest option

A Congressional Budget Office (CBO) study offers the latest evidence that the single-payer national health plan would cover the most Americans for the least cost.

The study examines four health reform packages that were introduced to Congress last year, including former Illinois Democratic Rep. Marty Russo's single-payer plan and a managed-competition proposal sponsored by Rep. Jim Cooper (D-TN).

Single-payer would be similar to Canada's government-administered national health program; managed competition would leave the big insurance companies in charge of the system.

It should be noted that the Cooper plan is not the same as the health reform package currently being formulated by the Clinton administration. And there are differences between the Russo bill and this year's congressional proposal for single-payer, the Wellstone-McDermott bill. Nonetheless, the CBO study makes a compelling case for the single-payer concept.

According to the CBO, the Russo bill would have cut overall health-care spending by \$319 billion over six years. This would amount to nearly \$4,000 for every U.S. family. The Cooper bill would have increased spending by \$214 billion over the same period.

In addition, the CBO rates the Russo bill's cost-control mechanisms highest and reports that the single-payer approach is the only one that would have led to significant administrative savings.



Furthermore, the CBO projects that in the year 2000 there would be no uninsured Americans under the Russo bill, but 25 million would have no insurance under the Cooper plan. And only the Russo bill would guarantee currently insured Americans better access to benefits and freedom to choose doctors. Better yet, single-payer advocates claim that the Wellstone-McDermott bill improves the Russo bill in the areas of cost-control and revenue-generation.

### Wedding-gate

When you think of Dick Nixon, you think of love. Well, maybe you don't, but somebody sure does. The Richard M. Nixon Library in Yorba Linda, Calif., is available for wedding ceremonies and receptions—and business is booming.

"There are some people who appreciate and respect the closeness of the Nixon family and have always admired them. I know that's a consideration for some couples," wedding organizer Kevin Cartwright told the Associated Press. "Mostly though, it's just a magnificent garden setting."

Included in that setting is "the actual gazebo used during Tricia Nixon and Edward Cox' White House Rose Garden wedding," according to *Nixonland*, the newsletter of the 37th president's library. Receptions and ceremonies are \$750 apiece, with a package deal price of \$1,000 for both.

There's also a fee of \$2.95 per guest. "That's based on the group rate for museum tours," explains Cartwright.

of his talent, he was desperate to find an outlet for his expression. He studied with the Experimental Black Actors Guild and the improvisational Second City collective. While attending college in New Jersey, he trained under the Negro Ensemble Company and Stella Adler. He performed stand up. Then he moved to Los Angeles and landed roles in Walter Hill's *The Warriors* and Norman Jewison's *A Soldier's Story*.

Returning to his native turf to discuss his work, Townsend was reflective. "If you can survive the licks, it just takes courage to confront whatever demons are attacking you," he says. "As a kid I was really weird. I've always had crazy ideas. I didn't buy into what the newspapers were saying about what I should be doing as an African-American. The concept of a kid as superhero always stayed with me. I can live out any of the fantasies that are in my head. I just have to write out the script and I can create whatever I want."

*The Meteor Man*, which opens in August, carries the director's trademark concerns and preoccupations. The film's sociopolitical context is interwoven with an inventive tale of an anonymous, carefree inner-city teacher, played by Townsend, who's endowed with extraordinary powers after being struck by a meteor. Townsend the director reverses the usual iconography—the white superhero axis of Batman and Superman—and weaves a cautionary tale about the modern American city. This superhero has the intonations, rhythms and personality of what many sociologists consider an endangered species, the urban black male. "I didn't want the film to be about the superpowers but more about what's going on in the neighborhood and the community," he says. "The bigger message is that the community has to take it back for themselves and not rely on the superhero."

The villains are the stylish and brutal Golden Lords, a nefarious gang whose black leather and gold-chain uniform is set off by blond Afros. *The Meteor Man's* satiric thrust is a far cry from the doom-laden naturalism of the Hughes brothers' *Menace II Society* and other inner-city gangster films. "There's gotta be a balance. Why is there the profanity? Why do we always have to talk down? I come with a PG film and I say kids should remain kids as long as possible. It's a shame that, in 1993, I'm the first superhero landing—and the only PG film in the next two and a half years. *Menace II Society*—there's 12 more of them coming. I can talk like that film: 'Yo, what's up, cuz? What's up?' Now I'm real. Now I'm black. If you've ever lived in the ghetto, you know it's not like that; that's part of the reality, but it's not like that. In *The Meteor Man*, I'm not considered valid because I'm articulate. I'm not jiving, I'm not shucking. I don't ever want to do stereotypes; none of my films will ever be shot in coon-arama," says Townsend, meaning the kind of exaggerated, wide-eyed stares of the ignoble past.

Townsend has the television show; he's written a script for *The Meteor Man* sequel and he wants to do a project about Duke Ellington. In Hollywood, control is destiny. "What happened in the past, [black] filmmakers started making movies they didn't put their heart and souls into. After you start selling your art short and becoming a whore to your craft, nobody wants to go see your movies. There were films Michael Schultz did because he was offered a lot of money; they didn't have good stories. The audience began to say, I can't get with this."

"I may only do 10 films in my lifetime, but I want each of them to be worthy enough to be seen again and again. If you have any audience out there that genuinely enjoys what you do and you have enough integrity, the audience will be there for a long time. People will walk out of *Meteor Man* saying, 'Robert didn't cheat us.'"

—Patrick Z. McGavin

# THE FIRST STONE

## INSLAW BREAKERS

By Joel Bleifuss

According to a recent Justice Department report, the Justice Department is innocent of any wrongdoing in the Inslaw affair. This absolution by Judge Nicholas Bua, who undertook the investigation at the behest of former Attorney General William Barr, contradicts the findings of two federal judges.

The scandal revolves around allegations that Justice Department employees under the direction of Attorney General Edwin Meese stole a software program from Inslaw, Inc., a Washington-based computer software company, and then conspired to send it into bankruptcy. At the center of this scandal is a software program called Promis, a statistical database that was designed to help federal prosecutors track the cases that come before them. What makes Promis unique as a case-management system is the program's ability, if properly coded, to integrate different databases.

Inslaw's owners, Bill Hamilton and Nancy Burke Hamilton, maintain that after stealing their software, the Justice Department distributed it among the various agencies of the U.S. intelligence community. They also assert that the software was doctored to allow electronic eavesdropping—thus creating a computerized Trojan horse that, once sold to and adopted by foreign intelligence agencies, would allow the National Security Agency trap-door access into foreign intelligence files.

It has been further alleged that after the Meese Justice Department stole the software, Attorneys General Dick Thornburgh and William Barr spent their tenure at the Justice Department mounting a cover-up.

Two federal judges ruled that the theft occurred, and the House Judiciary Committee investigation determined that there was evidence of a high-level cover-up. Then came retired federal Judge Nicholas Bua, who was hired by Attorney General Barr in November 1991 to do another investigation.

Bua filed his report with Attorney General Janet Reno in

March 1993. On May 29, a *Washington Post* editorial explained that the Bua report was "being studied and edited to remove information relating to national security." On June 17, Reno released a version of the report, with grand jury testimony redacted.

In his report Bua concluded, "The evidence we have compiled to date does not support a finding that DOJ employees intentionally deceived or defrauded Inslaw." If so, why did Bua, on Dec. 2, 1992, telephone Inslaw attorney Elliot Richardson, Richard Nixon's former attorney general, with an offer to settle the case for \$25 million—more than 3.5 times the amount awarded by the first federal judge who ruled in Inslaw's favor? Richardson told me they had three conversations on the subject and that he has the notes.

That is one of the numerous anomalies surrounding the Bua investigation that Reno would have to reconcile should she decide to accept the report as the final word on this sordid affair.

Upon releasing the report, Reno gave interested parties until July 31 to file their response. On July 12, Inslaw issued its analysis of the Bua report.

That 80-page rebuttal, authored by, among others, Richardson and the Hamiltons, enumerates procedural problems with the investigation and factual mistakes in the report. What follows are several of the Bua report's most glaring omissions.

- Bua apparently failed to question under oath *all* of the current and many of the former Justice Department employees who allegedly participated in or have knowledge of the software theft and the subsequent cover-up. In other words, the conspirators were allowed to lie with impunity to the Justice Department investigator.

- Bua's investigation could have determined whether or not the Justice Department stole Inslaw's software by analyzing the computer program the FBI uses to manage its cases. Inslaw has alleged that the FBI is one of the government agencies that is illegally using the software. Such a code comparison, which takes about four hours, would have settled that question once and for all. This was not done.

For an expert opinion, Bua turned to Dorothy Denning, a professor at Georgetown University's computer science department with ties to the intelligence community. Among other things, Denning said a comparison would have been "a waste of her time and the government's money."

The Inslaw rebuttal tersely dismisses Denning as a believable witness: "Denning's analysis makes no sense whatsoever."

- The Bua investigation did unearth startling evidence that bolsters the extremely serious allegation that in 1988 the Justice Department interfered with the appointment



process to the federal bench—in other words, it tampered with the courts.

Evidence suggests that the department worked successfully to sabotage the reappointment of federal bankruptcy Judge George Bason to a second term. In 1987 Bason had ruled in favor of Inslaw, saying, "The Department of Justice took, converted, stole [Inslaw's Promis software] by trickery, fraud and deceit."

Inslaw's rebuttal to the Bua report states: "The report reveals that criticisms of Judge Bason by his predecessor, Roger Whelan, were influential in the merit selection panel's deliberations about Judge Bason's suitability for reappointment. Whelan told the panel that Judge Bason was a poor administrator. Chief Judge Aubrey Robinson of the U.S. District Court, however, told the [House] Judiciary Committee that Judge Bason's only administrative problems were inherited from Judge Whelan."

As the Inslaw rebuttal points out, "At the same time Roger Whelan was disparaging Judge Bason to the merit selection panel, Whelan was counsel of record for AT&T [an Inslaw creditor] in the Inslaw bankruptcy." The Inslaw rebuttal provides evidence that suggests that throughout the Inslaw bankruptcy AT&T had been working in collusion with the Justice Department.

Bason was replaced as the head of the federal bankruptcy court for Washington, D.C., by Martin Teel. Teel had never been a judge and had little experience with bankruptcy law—though, perhaps not coincidentally, in 1987 he represented the Department of Justice before Bason.

•Teel was apparently not the only Justice Department employee rewarded for his work on the Inslaw case. In 1987, \$50,000 of the Justice Department's \$90,000 in discretionary service awards went to three employees who played a role in the conspiracy to steal the Inslaw software and send the company into bankruptcy.

Attorneys General Meese, Thornburgh and Barr could—and undoubtedly would—argue that their crimes of theft, cover-up and omission were committed to protect the vital national security interests of the United States. The evidence presented by Inslaw makes it clear that the Promis software was appropriated for use by various branches of the national security apparatus.

And that raises the question: If Promis software is vital to our national security, does that justify the government's actions in regards to Inslaw?

I put that question to Inslaw attorney Elliot Richardson, who in 1973

resigned as attorney general rather than obey Nixon's orders and fire Archibald Cox, the special prosecutor he had named to investigate Watergate.

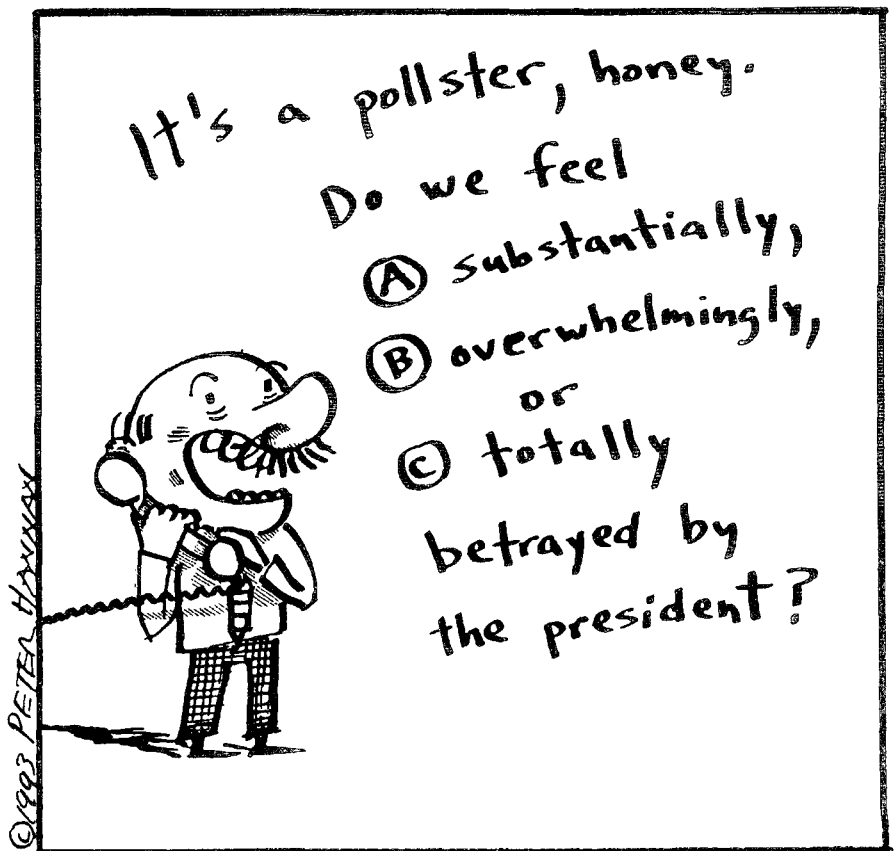
"The short answer is no," said Richardson. "The government could have found legitimate ways to get the rights to use it. Since that is so, at this stage any continued stonewalling or denial of any obligation to Inslaw becomes an increasingly gross denial of accountability. The very foundation of our society is a political system in which the government remains accountable, which in turn requires that it behave within the constraints of the Constitution in the way it treats people."

According to Richardson, the Inslaw affair offers parallels to both Watergate and Iran-contra. "In both of those cases the government was trying to do things in a manner that overrode the limitation on the powers invested in the executive branch and the presidency in particular," said Richardson. "What is involved with Inslaw is similar: the arrogant assumption that those who are charged, as they see it, with the national security interests are free to override private interests. This kind of attitude, applied on any broad scale, is a manifestation of a disregard of individual rights and the assumption of authoritarian executive power."

Justice is now in the hands of Attorney General Reno. She will decide whether she goes down in the annals of legal history as an Elliot Richardson—or as another Edwin Meese.

## THE ADVENTURES OF A HUGE MOUTH

by Peter Hannan



**POLITICS**

# Suffer the children

*Appeals to  
save "The  
Children" play  
on the fears  
of parents  
worried about  
their own kids.  
But they do  
more harm  
than good.*

By David Futrelle

**I**f patriotism is, as they say, the last refuge of scoundrels, then concern for "The Children" is running a close second-to-last. Like The Flag, The Family, Our Troops and other such abstract symbols of wholesome Americana, The Children serve nearly as many rhetorical and political uses as there are politicians to invoke them. It matters little that most of these invocations are meaningless or worse, that they obscure the very problems they ostensibly are intended to solve. Rhetorically, they work.

Traditionally, it has been cultural conservatives who have been the most reflexively comfortable with the symbolism of childhood innocence lost. When Anita Bryant launched her homophobic crusade in the '70s, it was only natural for her to name her organization Save Our Children, Inc., and (along with allies such as

Cops for Christ and Citizens for Decency Through Law, Inc.) to focus her attention on the dangers of homosexual "recruitment" of children in the schools. For conservatives, the notion of "saving" the children has long been at the heart of an ongoing campaign for decency.

But, these days, conservatives are hardly the only ones who turn to children when they find their rhetorical cannons short on gunpowder. When Janet Reno faced criticism for the fiasco in Waco, she self-righteously invoked the specter of "baby beating" and other allegations of child abuse on the Davidian compound. And, like Barbara Bush, a master of homey symbolism who paraded her concern for AIDS babies and other "innocent victims" of the disease, Hillary Rodham Clinton has done her bit for the kids. She works with the Children's Defense Fund, the perfect gig for a first lady who wants to project an image of intellectual independence and social responsibility without appearing, ahem, *too liberal*.

Hillary's husband has been similarly eager to present himself as being on the side of the littlest angels. When, last April, he found his economic package stalled, he piously lamented that the evil machinations of Bob Dole were preventing funds for childhood inoculation from getting through Congress. Appearing at the annual White House Easter egg roll, Clinton told reporters that children had become "the hostages of the Senate filibuster ... When I go out there on the lawn, and I think about those kids picking up Easter eggs, I want to be able to think about them all being immunized."

The battle over the stimulus package thus became a battle over The Children. Dole, for his part, claimed that he was fighting to save youngsters from a bigger deficit, to protect them from "this new immunization spending and hundreds of other spending and taxing plans which will rob them of their full potential." Dole, of course, isn't the only critic to accuse Bill Clinton of something close to child abuse; *New Republic* columnist Mickey Kaus recently lamented that, because of the president's chronic lateness, "he makes kids shiver waiting for him in the White House Rose Garden"—a transgression at least as bad as running up the deficit.

Perhaps the crassest, and most gratuitous, invocation of The Children in recent political history comes in the subtitle of Ross Perot's new book, *Not For Sale at Any Price*, which promises to tell its readers "How We Can Save America for Our Children." As it turns out, this reference to children is virtually the only one in the book. Readers searching long enough amongst Perot's homespun homilies and graphs will be able to find a few cursory remarks on the subject, and a vague sentence or two about education. But what Perot is





really concerned about is the propensity of the government to spend what he quaintly calls "our children's money." Perot's vision of child welfare, like Dole's, means nothing more than cutting the deficit. Our Children are just a prop.

If Perot's deficit-conscious youngsters are virtually invisible in his own book (and I've yet to meet any in real life), they do make an appearance in, of all things, a recent television commercial for Fuji film. The commercial is a typically postmodern production, devoid of information, designed to evoke a mood of intangible, unsettling wistfulness—which can presumably be relieved by the purchase of large quantities of film. The children in the commercial symbolize, one quickly gathers, a new, responsible generation, recoiling in their virtuous innocence from the presumed excesses of the '80s. (Or is it the '60s? It's hard to tell.) Instead of cavorting happily as kids in ads are wont to do, these conscience-ridden youngsters, sporting T-shirts announcing their membership in the "Clean Planet Club," cart litter off in large blue bags to recycle. One girl wears a button reading "Future Voter"; her friend, obviously a future Perot voter, sports one reading "Down With the Deficit."

What, besides the obvious opportunism, do all these examples have in common? In each case, the invocation of The Children, however irrelevant to the topic at hand, is designed to evoke a feeling of guilt, a vague sense of responsibilities evaded. We are left to wonder: have we, though our own self-indulgence, neglected the younger generation?

It's not hard to draw up a picture of children in peril.

Some 20 percent of American children (and half of black children) live in poverty, an enormous increase since the early '70s. Hundreds of thousands of children are homeless; millions have inadequate health care. Ten thousand children die each year due to the ravages of poverty. The immunization rates for black children in our country are worse than those of Botswana.

These problems are serious enough. But one of the main reasons that questions of parental responsibility hit so many with such unsettling force is simply that it is harder to balance the demands of work and family today than it was 20 years ago. Parents today complain that they have less time to spend with their children—and the statistics bear them out. Contemporary parents work longer hours than they or their equivalents did 20 years ago. They have little access to adequate child-care facilities, and too few have jobs that give them the flexibility they need to take care of the children.

According to economist Juliet Schor, the average worker in 1987 worked the equivalent of an extra month a year more than in 1969. Most work harder out of necessity: real wages have been dropping over the last two decades. Many families find they cannot support themselves with a single job; to keep their income from slipping those in the workforce have had to work harder and longer (in some cases by taking on additional jobs), and more women (especially married women) have had to enter the workforce. While 20 percent of married women worked at the close of World

War II, 66 percent worked in 1988. According to economist Sylvia Ann Hewlett, the percentage of infants under one year old with mothers in the workforce has risen from 11 percent in 1976 to 51 percent in 1988.

The "time squeeze" has hit women, particularly married women, with special force. Men, on average, are working the equivalent of two and a half weeks longer per year than they were two decades ago; women are working seven and a half weeks longer. Married women often end up working a "double shift" when they take a job, continuing to do the bulk of the housework despite working, in many cases, as many hours in the paid labor market as their husbands. Schor estimates that the total working time for employed mothers—the time devoted to paid work, child care and the chores at home—averages 65 hours a week; others estimate even higher averages, some as high as 80 hours a week.

As a result of all these changes, the amount of time ("quality" or otherwise) that parents spend with their kids has dramatically decreased. Economist Victor Fuchs estimates that between 1960 and 1986 the average time that parents spent with children dropped by 10 hours per week. Unfortunately, facilities for child care are expensive, inadequate, or both. (Poor families typically spend a quarter of their income on child care.) And so the number of American children in "self-care"—that is, taking care of themselves with no adult supervision—is now up to 7 million; some studies have estimated that up to one-third of all children regularly find themselves in situations where they have to take care of themselves.

The problem reflects a kind of cultural lag: while the conditions have changed, our institutions for (and assumptions about) child-rearing have not kept up. With few clear guidelines, and little outside help available, parents have to decide, on an everyday basis, what constitutes adequate attention to their kids. If they leave the kids alone for a few hours between when school lets out and when they get home from work are they guilty of child neglect? Nothing frightens a parent more than the accusation of neglect—and oftentimes, the accusation comes from within.

Much of the anger directed at David and Sharon Schoo, the Chicago-area couple who left their two young girls "home alone" while they went on a Mexican vacation, undoubtedly stemmed from this kind of redirected guilt. The attacks on the Schoos began the moment they stepped off the plane and into the hands of police, who escorted them, as the *Chicago Tribune* reported, through "a gantlet of shouting reporters and taunting bystanders." For a time, the Schoos were probably the most hated couple in America: radio talk shows were swamped with denunciations of the couple, and newspaper editorials portrayed the case as a dire symptom of cultural decay.

The Schoo case aroused attention not because it was aberrant but because, for many middle-class parents, it hit too close to home. However cruel and irresponsible the actions of the Schoos, there are worse examples of child abuse and neglect reported almost every day; the *Tribune*,

slow to catch onto the possibilities for sensationalism inherent in the case, buried its first report on the couple on the third page of its Metro section. The story climbed to the front page from there—propelled, as it were, by guilt. "The arrest of David and Sharon Schoo ... is compelling because it is at once so far from thinkable and so worrisomely close," wrote Betsy A. Lehman in the *Boston Globe*. "The idea of planning a foreign vacation without also planning for young children, as the Schoos are alleged to have done, seems abhorrent. Yet in everyday cases—leaving a child in a parked car for a few minutes, leaving children home alone after school, or while you do errands—reasonable parents, many of whom have too little money, too little time, too few relatives and neighbors upon whom they can depend, may be tempted and even succumb to making poor choices for their children. ... The Schoo case ... makes parents nation-

wide think: How close might I come? How close have I come?"

## *The problems facing children can't be solved by loading more guilt on the backs of harried and overworked parents.*

A similar kind of redirected parental guilt likely lies behind the sporadic witch hunts directed against child-care workers by parents who have always felt uneasy when the hand that rocks the cradle is not their own. It's telling that many of the more sensational claims of child abuse trumpeted in the media over the last few years have turned out to have been exaggerated, if not simply false—the result

of overzealous investigators manipulating impressionable children into "remembering" abuse that never happened. In the Edenton, N.C., "Little Rascals" preschool case portrayed in a recent *Frontline* episode, children seem to have been coaxed, if not coerced, into making accusations by "therapists" subjecting them to months of virtual interrogation; eventually the children "remembered" not only abuse but satanic rituals and excursions into outer space.

One might imagine that the extravagance of such claims might diminish the credibility of the children as witnesses; in fact, accusations of satanism in many cases simply fuel the hysteria. According to a widely distributed report put forth by a group called The Ritual Abuse Task Force of The Los Angeles County Commission For Women, the satanic conspiracy has reached epidemic proportions. "Ritual abuse has ... occurred, without parents knowing, at preschools, day-care centers, churches, summer camps, and at the hands of baby-sitters and neighbors," the Task Force asserts. "The ritual abuse in such an institutional setting is not incidental to its operation, but it is in fact intrinsic to it, the very reason for its existence."



Evidence for these claims has not exactly been overwhelming. As Jeffrey S. Victor's book *Satanic Panic: The Creation of a Contemporary Legend* makes clear, the witch hunts (some of which were quite literally that) inspired by mass hysteria over alleged abuse, "ritual" or otherwise, have ruined the lives of scores of innocent people and reinforced the fear and guilt of parents who need to rely on child care. According to journalist Debbie Nathan, who has debunked claims of ritual sex abuse for the *Village Voice* and *In These Times* (see *ITT*, July 24, 1991), such accusations can deflect attention from potential problems at home. "Investigations usually began because of vague medical symptoms or after an upper-middle-class child did something inappropriately sexual," Nathan has written. "Then, even though most sexual abuse occurs within the family, investigators immediately directed their inquiries outside the home."

Similarly, parental ambivalence over the use of electronic babysitters such as television, video games and films has provided the impetus for the revived crusade against images of violence in the popular culture—a crusade that has united people as ideologically divergent as neoconservative film critic Michael Medved and liberal Sen. Paul Simon (D-IL), and which has recently forced the networks to promise to put violence ratings on their shows.

For liberals, the crusade has been at best a distraction from real-world manifestations of violence bred of real-world poverty; for conservatives it has served a more dubious purpose. In his censorious tract *Hollywood Versus America*, Medved not only attacks visual violence; he accuses the film industry of "a preference for the perverse" and a "bias for the bizarre," because of its routine depiction of "sexual adventurism," by which he means all sex outside the bonds of holy matrimony. (Medved, who has what one might call an addiction to alliteration, is particularly bothered by the "homeless homosexual hustlers" in *My Own Private Idaho*.) More disturbingly, Medved's revulsion to violence only extends, it seems, to the imaginary kind: he longs for "the energetic, flag-waving films of my boyhood," and is outraged that Hollywood "continues to ignore the opportunity to exploit the most popular application of military power in some fifty years," namely the Gulf War.

Medved's perverse illogic reflects what can happen when a debate over symbolism becomes disconnected from the real-world problems it is—presumably—intended to address. The problems facing children—from infant mortality to the problems of "self-care"—can't be solved by simple invocations of traditional morality, or by loading more guilt on the backs of harried and overworked parents, any more than the problems of the world can be solved by a mediocre film critic's energetic flag-waving. These problems are at core economic, and we can't solve them unless we are willing to reshuffle our resources, to reorder our spending priorities. Some of the solutions are even now within reach: according to the National Commission to Prevent Infant Mortality, half of the infant deaths in this country could be avoided if the U.S. launched the kind of preventative strategies com-

mon in other countries. Others require more long-term perspectives. The problems of child care cannot be solved except by putting a significant amount of money and resources, public and private, into day-care facilities in the workplace and in our local communities. The problems of childhood poverty, of inequality in education, can be solved only by significantly redistributing wealth—and by abandoning the austerity budgets of Perot and the other deficit-fetishists. Deficit-cutting may be more of a danger to the next generation than the deficit is presumed to be.

Those who focus primarily on scapegoats—from satanic babysitters to the "Home Alone" parents—can offer only symbolic answers to real crises. The problems of children are inseparable from the problems of adults—poverty, lack of housing and jobs, inadequate health and child care ... it's a familiar list. And since women have been the most burdened by the twin deficits of time and money, a commitment to children requires a redoubled commitment to the needs of women. If adults, particularly women, were more secure in their jobs and as parents, if they were freed from unrealistic demands and unrealistic expectation, they wouldn't be so burdened with guilt and so prey to the hollow promises of cultural conservatism. If the problems facing adults were taken care of, many of the problems facing children would take care of themselves—and the rhetorical invocation of The Children, like much else in our political discourse, might come to seem a little beside the point. ◀

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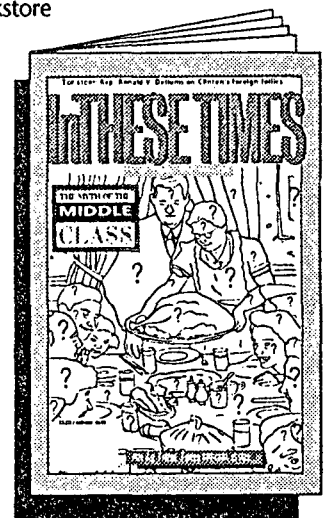
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## PUBLIC POLICY

# Infantile arguments

**D**uring the last two decades, American youth experienced the most rapid deterioration in economic and social conditions since the Depression. Youth poverty has jumped 51 percent since 1973. Violence, early pregnancy, crime, school dropout rates and other social ills predicted by poverty reversed previous declines and rose rapidly during the late '80s, according to government statistics.

*A close look at teen-pregnancy figures shows how policy-makers distort the social and economic problems facing young people.*

By Mike Males

"In the past 20 years or so, the social metric in America has shifted from child well-being to adult well-being," the University of Texas sociologist Norval Glenn points out. No other industrial society devotes more resources to adults and fewer to youth than the United States.

Today's American adults

over age 40 are our richest generation in history. Yet one in five American youths now live under poverty guidelines—four times the rate in Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and Germany, double the rate in Britain, 60 percent higher than in Canada, according to a 1988 Urban Institute study.

Washington's response: blame the victim. The Reagan and Bush administrations ignored the economic and social conditions behind these youth problems. Instead—with the support of media and the private sector—policy-makers emphasized "prevention" measures aimed at the young people themselves. According to federal figures, violent-crime arrests of those under 18 years of age have risen 50 percent since 1983; drug arrests among young people have doubled since the early '80s; forced drug and mental-health treatment of young people has quadrupled since 1975. Behavior-education programs—such as those stressing drug and sex abstinence—are now government-mandated or recommended in 47 states.

But as these "prevention" measures have proliferated, the problems they were supposed to ameliorate have grown. Since the early '80s, violent crime and drug deaths

among youths have doubled and childbirth rates have risen 20 percent. All those rates had previously been declining.

Of many examples of failed youth policy that could be cited, the worst is "teenage" pregnancy—an issue so misrepresented by all interests involved that institutionalized mythology has replaced reasoned analysis.

The "teen pregnancy" issue plays itself out in the American Zeitgeist according to a standard ritual. Agencies survey, panels assemble, conferees meet. An avalanche of dire reports condemning the "\$16 billion annual social costs" of "epidemic teenage pregnancy" follow.

Then comes the media hype. Commentators blame pregnancy rates on promiscuous "kids," declining moral values, Hollywood's influence and "peer pressure." Experts may disagree on the solutions—those on the left advocate more sex education and better access to birth control, while those on the right push abstinence and legal punishments aimed at teen mothers—but few authorities of any stripe question the premises of the debate.

And those premises distort the troubling realities of what we call "teen" pregnancy. Thus, the solutions based on those assumptions are unworkable nonsense, often embodying serious sexist and racist implications. Consider some crucial, rarely mentioned facts:

- The large majority of all "teenage" pregnancy is caused by adults. Health agencies and programs funded by Congress' Adolescent Family Life Act condemn "peer pressure" to have sex (particularly among junior-high students).



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**Teenage mothers at a transitional shelter in Chicago.**

Nonetheless, "teenage" pregnancy, childbearing and sexually transmitted disease are predominantly *adult-teen* events.

National vital statistics reports show that 70 percent of all births among teenage women are fathered by adult men over age 20; one in six by men over age 25. Detailed figures, from the California Vital Statistics section's tabulation of 60,000 births among teenage mothers in 1990, are more shocking.

Of some 5,000 births among California junior-high girls, ages 11-15, only 7 percent were fathered by junior-high boys. Four in 10 were fathered by high-school-age boys, ages 16-18, and more than half by post-high-school adult men ages 19 and older.

Among high-school mothers, male partners averaged nearly four years older. The younger the mother, the wider the age gap. Male partners to mothers age 12 and younger averaged 22 years of age. Of 889 married California junior-high girls who gave birth in 1990, two-thirds of their husbands were past high-school age.

In addition, adult men fathered 2,000 children among California unwed junior-high girls in 1990, seven times more than were fathered by junior-high boys. And adult women over age 20 have some 3,000 babies fathered by high-school-age boys every year in California.

Adult-teen sex is also widespread among homosexuals. A 1978 survey of 500 male homosexuals found one-fourth admitted that, when over age 21, they had sex with boys age 16 and younger.

Unsettling as these facts are, they get worse.

•**The large majority of the 2 million-plus "teen" sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and sexually transmitted AIDS cases in the United States are also caused by adults.** Reliable gonorrhea and syphilis figures have existed for 35 years from the Centers for Disease Control; AIDS tabulations since 1988. They all point to an ugly pattern.

Among adults, STD rates among men are double those among women. But STD and AIDS rates among females under age 20 are double those among boys under age 20.

How are all these girls getting infected? Not only from voluntary relationships with adult men (who are many times more likely to carry STDs and AIDS than are teenage boys), but also from rape.

•**A federally funded 1992 study of 4,000 women indicates that some 1 million children are raped every year.** More than 60 percent of all rapes in the nation involve victims younger than 18, according to the study by the National Victims' Center, an advocacy group.

For one-third of all U.S. girls and one-fifth of all boys, rape and sexual abuse are their introductions to sex. A 1985 *Los Angeles Times* survey found rapists of children average



30 and victims 10 years of age. More than half of the rapists were "someone in authority."

Some 50,000 teen pregnancies every year are caused by rape. But the psychological devastation of rape has an even wider impact on the teen pregnancy rate. A 1992 study of hundreds of teen mothers by Washington researchers Debra Boyer and David Fine found that two-thirds have histories of rape and sexual abuse by offenders averaging 27 years of age. Abused girls report their first sexual experience two years younger than non-abused girls, and with a partner averaging five to six years older.

•Poverty and "teen" pregnancy are so strongly correlated that for any state or locality, the annual "teen" birth rate can be accurately predicted from the youth poverty rate.

Mississippi (1990 per-capita income \$12,735) has a youth poverty rate—and also a youth childbearing rate—three times higher than Connecticut (\$25,358). Los Angeles' poorest neighborhoods have teen pregnancy rates 20 times higher than its richest neighborhoods.

Three in 10 teenage girls in California's poorest county (Tulare, home to thousands of impoverished migrant workers) live in poverty and 5 percent give birth every year—rates six times higher than in California's richest county (Marin), where only one in 20 young people lives in poverty and the annual teen birth rate is below 1 percent.

The poor got poorer in the Reagan-Bush years. Yet it was far more convenient for Washington policy-makers to blame young women for the teen pregnancy rate than to blame themselves. Teenage girls make perfect scapegoats. For one thing, they have no political clout. And attacks on "teen mothers" perpetuate racist and sexist stereotypes that would otherwise be impolitic to promote.

Does the Clinton administration promise more enlightened, compassionate, reality-driven policy than the current moralistic blindness? It's too early to tell—but some of the indica-

tors aren't good.

Clinton's wife, Hillary, and his chief health official, Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna Shalala, are affiliated with the Children's Defense Fund (CDF), a program whose technical research papers are among the best in connecting poverty and adult-teen sex to early pregnancy.

Yet the CDF's public stance has been one of the worst in terms of advancing derogatory myths about teen sex. The CDF's popular poster campaign promotes '50s stereotypes of the stupid, "bad" high-school mother ("It's like being grounded for 18 years") and her selfish, dumb athlete-boyfriend ("Wait'll you see how fast he can run when you tell him you're pregnant").

In fact, high-school couples account for only one in seven "teen" pregnancies and fewer than 2 percent of all pregnancies in the United States, according to government figures. Nonetheless, CDF Director Marian Wright Edelman continues to blame teen sex on MTV video images and "spiritual poverty" among the young—downplaying true causes: economic poverty, rape, adult-youth sex.

Similarly, Clinton, in his nomination of Joycelyn Elders for surgeon general, emphasized that she would undertake "aggressive efforts" to "reduce teenage pregnancy." Elders' intensive campaign to establish school-based clinics (including contraceptive distribution) in Arkansas, however, was accompanied by rising teen childbearing rates.

Worse still, Vice President Gore's wife, Tipper, has promoted a video, shown to some 5 million Americans through her Parents' Music Resource Center, which blames both "teen" pregnancy and the sexual abuse of girls on teenagers corrupted by rock'n'roll and rap lyrics.

And the record of the right's abstinence-based solutions is no better. The much-publicized decrease in teen pregnancy in San Marcos, Calif., following the city's Teen Aid abstinence program was found by *San Diego Union* investigators to have been fabricated.

Sooner or later, escapism must be abandoned and facts faced: "teen" pregnancy is not simply the result of dumb, immoral, ignorant or careless kids. Rather, early parenthood is an index of the levels of poverty, abuse and bleak opportunities afforded young women. It is also a measure of their efforts to escape their harsh conditions by alliance with older partners—a survival strategy that research is finding as psychologically healthy, given the limited opportunities the American poor increasingly face. "Teen" pregnancy will decrease when poverty, abuse and unhealthy conditions forced on the young improve, when men are held responsible for their roles in teenage childbearing, and when politicians and interest groups no longer indulge in expedient myths. ◀

Mike Males is a freelance journalist living in Los Angeles. The media watchdog group Project Censored named his May 20, 1992, *In These Times* report on myths of the war on drugs as one of 1992's top 10 underreported stories.

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## THE PRESIDENCY

# Prudence over principle

# B

ill Clinton has now backed away from another set of commitments he made during the campaign. Last month, he abandoned his attempt to remove restrictions on gays serving in the military. Under Clinton's plan, gays can serve as long as they don't explicitly reveal or express their sexuality.

Clinton also acknowledged that he would accept Congress' verdict on whether abortion should be funded in his national health insurance plan. This means he will probably include it in his plan, but will not fight for it if Congress chooses to omit it.

Gay-rights organizations and women's groups are denouncing Clinton for breaking these promises. But this time (in contrast to his having broken promises on middle-class tax cuts, CEO salaries, social security, student loans, national health insurance, China, Bosnia and what have you), Clinton did the best thing. The president couldn't keep these

promises without undermining his presidency.

The cases of gay military service and federal funding of abortion are different, but the same general argument applies. Public opposition to both objectives is so great that Clinton could not have convinced Congress to accept them. By fighting for them, Clinton has endangered not only his own re-election and that of other Democrats, but also his ability to enact his broader economic agenda, including national health insurance. And these economic objectives are both achievable and more important to achieve.

This is not a case of opportunism, but one of evaluating what opportunities really exist. Clinton could get national health insurance, but not if he exhausts his political capital in a fight over abortion and gay rights. Clinton could not get Congress to remove restrictions on gays in the military. He had to make a choice, and he made the right one in abandoning futile struggles over social reform.

**Gays in the military:** The president was on firm moral, if not constitutional, grounds in advocating that most restrictions on gay service in the military be removed. But he ran up against deep and widespread opposition—not only in the military and Congress but throughout the country. More important, the opposition was politically *salient*: it was most intense among those middle- and working-class voters whose loyalty the Democrats must retain in order to stay in office and pass the rest of their program.

If Clinton had persisted in his original proposal, Congress would have passed a veto-proof measure maintaining the original ban on homosexual service. In addition, as happened in the U.S. Senate race last spring in Texas, most Republicans would have used Clinton's support for gays in the military to discredit Democrats among swing voters. And it would have worked.

What should the president have done? Ideally, he originally should have proposed the kind of compromise he finally made. Clinton's current proposal opens the door not only to a court challenge but to a gradual acceptance of gays in the military. Then, if he won a second term, he could have expanded it to the kind of measure that Rep. Barney Frank (D-MA) argued for last May—allowing gay soldiers to do whatever they want out of uniform.

As matters now stand, Clinton could get the worst of all possible outcomes. He could get blamed by voters for opening the door to gays in the military, while being attacked by gays and feminists for closing it. But by adopting a compromise that the military publicly endorsed, Clinton may finally have put the issue behind him.

**Funding abortions:** Clinton officials and many of the Washington social lobbies misread last year's election results. They took Clinton's victory not only as a repudiation of right-wing fundamentalism, but as an affirmation of

**In These Times'**  
*Washington*  
*correspondent*  
*argues that*  
*Clinton's retreat*  
*on gay and*  
*abortion rights*  
*was his only*  
*option.*

By John B. Judis  
WASHINGTON D.C.

the entire liberal social agenda—from domestic-partner laws to abortion on demand. It was not.

A majority of Americans support the general constitutional right to an abortion. But they oppose both unrestricted abortion and federal funding of abortions. Faced with public opposition, Democrats in Congress are already backing away from the unequivocal language in the Freedom of Choice Act. And the Clinton administration and Washington abortion-rights lobbyists were dealt a massive setback this June when the House of Representatives reinstated the Hyde Amendment limiting federal funding of abortion to cases of rape and incest.

Like gay rights, federal funding of abortion is a politically salient issue. Opposition to it is strongest among constituents that the Democrats need for their economic program. This was evident in the House vote on the Hyde amendment.

The House passed the amendment by 255 to 178. Southern Democrats voted in favor of the amendment by 44 to 41. And a third of northern Democrats supported it. These included Democrats from predominantly white ethnic districts: Majority Leader Richard Gephardt from south St. Louis, Marcy Kaptur from suburban Toledo, Dan Rostenkowski and William Lipinski from Chicago and its environs, and John LaFalce from suburban Buffalo.

Of course, federal funding is not as potentially divisive an issue as gays in the military. It probably would not cost a president or senator an election, but it could derail Clinton's chances of passing national health insurance. If the president were to insist that federal funding be included in a final health bill, he could cause the measure to be defeated or be held up for years—the way aid for education was stalled in the '50s by the disputes over parochial-school funding. Clinton acted prudently in giving ground.

Unlike gay service in the military, federal funding of abortions is also not an issue where one side can claim the moral

high ground. Proponents of federal funding argue that the right to have an abortion is meaningless if a woman cannot afford one. But opponents argue that using taxpayer funds is tantamount to forcing many Americans to support—and not merely legally permit—an act they consider to be murder.

It's the same argument Quaker war resisters make about paying taxes to fund the defense budget. But it makes less sense in their case, because they are a tiny minority and because the country could not defend itself militarily or perform its legislative tasks if particular budgetary provisions were subject to individual boycott. Those adamantly opposed to abortion amount to as many as a third of Americans, and the president and Congress are wise to take their sentiments seriously.

It's painful to admit, but in dealing with the most extreme demands of gay-rights or pro-choice lobbies, Clinton should emulate Ronald Reagan. Reagan passionately embraced the high principles of the religious right while keeping his distance from their practical agenda. He recognized that if he put all his resources into a battle for school prayer or the prohibition of abortion, he would have divided his own base and made it impossible for him to pass his economic program.

Clinton should do likewise, upholding the principles of freedom of choice and opposing discrimination against gays. He should oppose fundamentalist efforts to make abortion impossible or to invalidate anti-discrimination ordinances, but he should distance himself from the more controversial parts of the abortion- and gay-rights agenda.

Clinton's real problem is not in keeping his commitments to the National Abortion Rights Action League or the Campaign for Military Service, but in keeping his promises to fund public investment, finance college education and enact national health insurance. Now that he has put months of bitter social controversy behind him, Clinton needs to re-focus his presidency on these issues. These are promises that Clinton can actually keep. ◀



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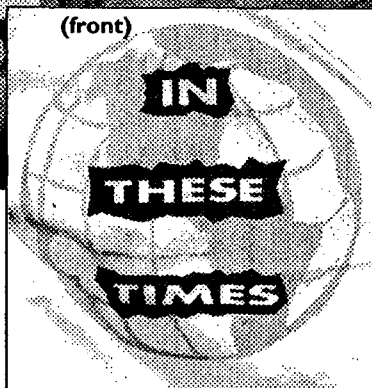
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## FOREIGN POLICY

# The plot thins

**B**

ill Clinton's recent decision to launch a cruise missile attack on Baghdad was based on the claims of Wali Abdelhadi Ghazali, a male nurse from the Iraqi city of Najaf. Ghazali says that Iraqi intelligence officers instructed him to travel to Kuwait to kill George Bush during the former president's visit this past April.

But most of those who are alleged to have taken part appear to be whiskey smugglers by trade, not assassins, and all but Ghazali deny knowing anything of the plot. Furthermore, there are a number of inconsistencies in Ghazali's story.

Two hours after the June 27 attack, President Clinton went on television to blame Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and his security forces for plotting to kill Bush. "This attempt at revenge by a tyrant against the world coalition that defeated him in war is par-

ticularly loathsome. We could not and cannot let such action go unanswered."

To justify the raid, Madeleine Albright, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, produced evidence that focused on an Iraqi intelligence attempt to explode a car bomb on the streets of Kuwait. The administration says the bomb was aimed at George Bush.

At the Kuwait trial of the 14 men accused of the plot, testimony points to a scheme devised in the week before Bush arrived in Kuwait for the Gulf victory celebrations in April. One of the accused is Raad Abdel Amir al-Assadi, 33, a self-possessed man who owns the Marbed coffee shop in the southern Iraqi city of Basra, 70 miles from Kuwait. Assadi says the Marbed is "a café for smugglers"—a flourishing occupation in Basra where Iraqi bootleggers can buy alcohol legally and sell it profitably in Kuwait, which is "dry."

Any Iraqi involved in smuggling would probably need to know somebody in the police or intelligence service, and Assadi says

he knew some Iraqi intelligence officers.

One of these, Mohammed Jawad, asked him to guide somebody into Kuwait City on April 9 in return for 13 cases of whiskey and 15,000 Iraqi dinars, worth about \$195. Jawad also gave him 10 sticks of dynamite and told him that he was to blow up Kuwait car shops and showrooms. Assadi says he agreed to go because he needed the money and was frightened of Iraqi intelligence, but he never took his mission as a saboteur too seriously. He was more interested in selling the whiskey, and he buried the dynamite in the desert before he reached Kuwait.

He also says that neither Jawad nor anybody else told him about a plan to assassinate Bush. He says he did not even know the former president was in Kuwait, and the first he knew about the plot to blow him up was when he was told about it by his Kuwaiti police interrogator.

But Ghazali, 36, says he was told to kill Bush. A male nurse, he works in a hospital in Najaf, a holy city of the Shia Muslims close to the Euphrates between Baghdad and Basra. On April 8, only a day before they were due to cross the border, Ghazali was approached in Basra by an Iraqi intelligence officer called Abu Rafed.

Rafed asked him if he knew why sanctions had been imposed on Iraq and Iraqi children went hungry. "The international resolutions?" ventured Ghazali. "No, it's Bush," said Rafed. "He is the reason for the destruction. We are sending you to Kuwait." Ghazali did not like the idea. He told Rafed that he had five children and his wife was in the hospital.

Ghazali was to take a Toyota Land Cruiser containing a 180-pound bomb and park it in Kuwait University, where Bush, his family and former Secretary of State

*Did Iraq really  
conspire to kill  
George Bush?  
The evidence is  
a lot flimsier  
than the White  
House would  
have you  
believe.*

By Patrick Cockburn



James Baker were being honored by the Kuwaitis. There was a remote-control detonation device and, if that failed, a timing device.

Rafed said that when Bush's car "comes close to it from a distance of 200 or 300 yards, you push the button and the car will explode and Bush's car also." The Iraqi intelligence man also gave him an exploding belt which, if the car bomb failed, could be used by Ghazali to blow himself up, and Bush as well.

It is this evidence that is the basis for the U.S. claim. But there are a number of peculiarities about the story. The bomb plot was explained to the man who was to carry it out only the week before he was to go to Kuwait on a mission that required a suicidal willingness to die. Moreover, Iraqi intelligence seemed primarily intent on causing mayhem in Kuwait City, and the attempt on Bush, by Ghazali's account, sounds like a bonus.

Even if Ghazali had obeyed all his instructions, he would not have succeeded in killing the former president. Bush and his family were in an armored car, so that the Toyota Land Cruiser would have had to be parked very close to kill him; not 200 to 300 yards away. Iraqi intelligence had also gotten his itinerary wrong. Bush did not visit Kuwait University where Ghazali was meant to park the car but went to another university in Kuwait.

From its conception, the plan fell apart. Kuwaiti intelligence claims it had prior knowledge of an attack dating from March but has yet to produce evidence of this. Ghazali and Assadi, accompanied by other Iraqis, most of whom appear to be smugglers, crossed the border into Kuwait and were arrested on April 13. Their morale was low. Iraqi intelligence gave Ghazali a 9mm pistol with two grenades, but he says he was so frightened "that I began praying as soon as I reached Kuwait."

They hid the Toyota in a sheep pen to go on reconnaissance and stayed with two Kuwaitis also involved in smuggling alcohol. When they returned to the Toyota, they found it surrounded by policemen. Ghazali escaped, throwing away his exploding belt, and he and three others stole a car to try to return to Kuwait. When it broke down, they started to walk across the desert but were seen and arrested.

The Kuwaitis said they had discovered a conspiracy to



©Rick Reinhard/Impact Visuals

kill Bush almost immediately. Ever since the government returned to the emirate after the Gulf War, it has frequently alleged Iraqi interference in its affairs. But such allegations are not always reliable. Kuwaiti officials once claimed, for example, that an Iraqi naval force had invaded the Kuwaiti island of Bubiyan and was repelled by Kuwaiti forces. Investigation revealed that the invasion force consisted of Iraqi fishermen looking for scrap.

Only in early May did the FBI and CIA begin to think that Baghdad might have made a serious effort to kill

**Bomb first, ask questions later. Iraqi bomb shelter destroyed by U.S. forces, March 1991.**



Bush. Hussein is notoriously vindictive. He had killed Iraqi, Kurdish and Palestinian opponents in foreign capitals. In Kurdistan, from which the Iraqi army has withdrawn, Iraqi intelligence has exploded a series of bombs in the past 18 months.

In Washington, there were some doubters, particularly in the Pentagon. They said that the way the Kuwaitis had interviewed the prisoners made their testimony useless.

The implication is that the 14 men under arrest were tortured, though the FBI, which later interviewed them, denies this. Human rights organizations say there has been a decrease in torture over the past year, but they have no direct access to the men on trial.

The trial itself opened before the heavily guarded state security court on June 5, the first time the accused had been seen by anybody except the police since their arrests. The prosecution accused 12 men of plotting to kill Bush. Two Kuwaitis are accused of harboring the plotters and smuggling drugs and alcohol.

Their chances of a fair trial do not look good. Middle East Watch says that 16 people sentenced to death in Kuwait by the state security court in June mostly "complained of severe beatings inflicted on them to elicit confessions for alleged crimes of collaboration."

Was there an assassination attempt? And was it ordered by Saddam Hussein? Washington emphasizes that the circuitry, electronics, timer and explosives in the Toyota Land Cruiser closely resemble Iraqi car bombs found elsewhere. This helps to prove that Iraqi intelligence planted a bomb in Kuwait but not that they planned to assassinate Bush.

Incompetence does not

rule out an assassination attempt, but the recruitment of a gang of whiskey smugglers to plant a bomb at the wrong university does make it more difficult to take seriously. ◀

Patrick Cockburn writes for Britain's *Independent on Sunday*, from which this article was excerpted with permission.

## Verdict first, evidence later

**A**n odd reasoning underlies U.S. media coverage of administration claims that Iraq was behind the alleged plot on George Bush's life. It's a logic similar to that of one Kuwaiti businessman, who told the *Wall Street Journal*: "The verdict on whether the Iraqis tried to kill Bush has been passed by virtue of the American strike. Obviously the Americans believe these guys did try to kill Bush. We never doubted it."

Nor, apparently, did mainstream news organizations. As media critic and syndicated columnist Norman Solomon puts it: "U.S. journalists tend to take such assertions on faith. It's somewhat like *Alice in Wonderland*: first the verdict, then the evidence later—maybe."

In an informal survey of the country's leading news outlets, *In These Times* could find no attempts to independently confirm the administration's charges of Iraqi involvement in the bomb plot. And those few news organizations that did look into the administration's claims went to an odd source: the administration itself.

Examining the government's "exhaustive investigation" of "Iraq's masterminding role," R. Jeffrey Smith assured *Washington Post* readers that "[d]isclosure of [the] Iraqi intelligence link goes beyond the largely circumstantial evidence presented publicly by the Clinton administration to justify the attack on Baghdad. [Administration] officials, who spoke on the condition they not be named, said other evidence of Iraq's involvement was derived from classified sources and methods, including a sensitive study of Iraqi intelligence recruitment methods."

If all this—the unnamed sources, the "classified" information—sounds a little familiar, it should. Back in 1986, President Reagan, in justifying an air attack on Libya, cited "irrefutable evidence" that the government of Moammar Qadaffi was behind a deadly Berlin disco bombing.

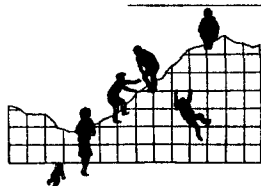
That "irrefutable evidence," however, was quickly refuted by Manfred Ganshow, the head of a 100-person team investigating the bombing. Three weeks after the incident, Ganshow told the armed-services publication *Stars and Stripes*: "[I have] no more evidence that Libya was connected to the bombing than I had two days after the act. Which is none."

Nonetheless, a *New York Times* editorial claimed that the proof was "laid out clearly to the public. ... Even the most scrupulous citizens can only approve and applaud the American attacks on Libya."

But as Solomon and Martin A. Lee explain in *Unreliable Sources: A Guide to Detecting Bias in the U.S. Media*: "Months later, West German authorities concluded that if any country was behind the Berlin disco bombing, it was Syria, not Libya. But that hardly seemed to matter as U.S. news media continued to blame the incident on Qadaffi. Soon another round of stories appeared, warning of new plots by Libya. Replete with 42 references to unnamed U.S. officials, a *Wall Street Journal* article ... disclosed that Qadaffi was planning more terrorism. This time the unnamed source turned out to be National Security Adviser John Poindexter, who was promoting what *Newsweek* later called a 'disinformation program' aimed at destabilizing the Libyan government. The propaganda operation was outlined in a three-page memo, dated August 14, 1986, from Poindexter to President Reagan. ... [When the operation was revealed] reporters and editors cried foul, expressing righteous indignation about being misled by the U.S. government."

Now the pattern seems to be repeating itself. "In this instance the U.S. press bought a package from the same institution that has sold a lot of bills of goods in the past," says Solomon. "I often think of a quote attributed to Napoleon: 'It's not necessary to censor the news; it's sufficient to delay it until it no longer matters.'"

—Miles Harvey



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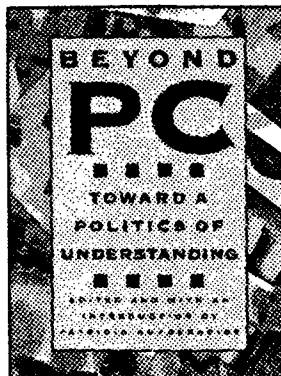
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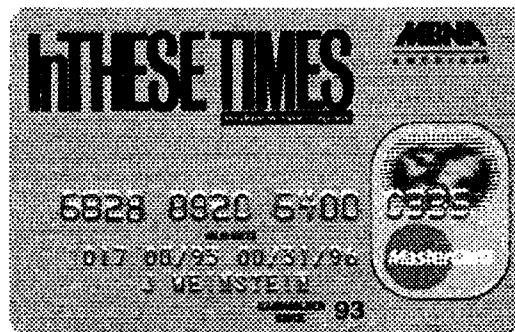
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## DIALOGUE

# Biology isn't destiny

By Beth Maschinot

**M**emorial Day. We've done the rites—guacamole, bean dip and chicken. We huddle around the TV on the patio as our modern warriors, the Bulls, outshoot and outmaneuver the Knicks on TV. In the backyard, the girls and boys wield heavy plastic waterguns, shooting furiously at each other. Later, when the girls go in to watch *Monty Python*, the six boys pair up. Time for hand-to-hand combat, all wrestling, no punches allowed.

The parents, lefties all, watch in rapt attention, making comments on how evenly or unevenly matched each twosome is. One mom talks proudly about how she has a friend who's been giving her son wrestling tips. A father says, with some surprise, that even though his son has been in the room while he's flipped through cable channels showing wrestling, the boy

hasn't shown much interest—"yet." A non-parent, a man who is the most talkative, sociable person there, says to everyone as we watch the matches, "Don't you think that boys just are more aggressive than girls?" Some days, with a more familiar crowd, this would have brought out the attack dog in me. Maybe that was Bruce's intent, to pump some wind in the fast-fading group. But today, the combination of situational shyness and four margaritas keeps me quiet. (Or is it that on those other days my estrogen had ebbed, allowing my testosterone to be prominent, while today I'm just "all woman"?)

In his book, *The Inevitability of Patriarchy*, written in 1973, sociologist Stephen Goldberg claims that in every society on anthropological record (all 1,200 of them), males have a greater drive toward dominance in both hier-

archies and in male-female relationships. Because these realities are so universal, Goldberg argues that it is the presence of biological differences that must make it so. He chooses testosterone as that differential factor.

In the May 31 *In These Times*, Helen Fisher argues that the biological evidence that supports Goldberg's theory should be taken seriously. She baldly asserts that there is a "clear link between testosterone and aggression" and that "high rank is associated with high levels of male hormones in males and monkeys."

Such biological arguments are seductive because they seem so, well, hard-wired, essential, unmessy, just plain *real*. The problem is that when testosterone is used as the soundbite answer to differences in aggression and dominance between genders, factors like historical role differentiation, current gender socialization and the realities of sex discrimination get left by the wayside.

Goldberg's title says it all. If dominance can be reduced to aggression, which can be reduced to testosterone, then men as a group will always "have the upper hand." He who has the testosterone rules the world. But Goldberg's work has been faulted from many directions in the intervening 20 years since his book appeared.

Most scientists agree that the fetal brain is "sexed" at birth, with boys receiving more testosterone and girls more estrogen. But unpacking the link between fetal brain hormones and different behavior between the sexes is a much more complex business than Goldberg allows, and has been the subject of well-regarded books by biologists—notably *Myths of Gender* by Ann Fausto-Sterling and *Science and Gender* by Ruth Bleier.

First, as always, is the sticky problem of definition: what do we mean by aggression? Though Goldberg doesn't define his main concept, he says that aggression or dominance "manifests



itself in the satisfaction of many needs: dominance behavior, competitiveness ... a desire for control and power, and many other impositions of the will on the environment." All this is due to testosterone, according to Goldberg.

In the biological and social science research, pinning down just what aggression is has also been difficult. At times it's regarded as thoughts or actions taken with the intent to harm others; at other times it's synonymous with assertion, ambition or competitiveness. Some "hard" biology research that relates levels of testosterone in the blood with "aggression" defines aggression as "angry feelings," and some even use "depression" as a proxy for angry feelings. This is not academic hair-splitting. It shows the difficulty of doing so-called "hard science" research without the conflation of social and biological categories.

Contrary to many lay people's belief, the question is not easily answerable by hooking up some "testosterometer" and counting behaviors. In fact, Fausto-Sterling argues that it makes little sense to measure a single hormone out of context and to use that measurement to posit a causal relationship with a particular behavior. The relationship among hormones, and between hormones and behavior, is too complex for that, with the possible exception of the more direct relationship of testosterone and sex drive.

In one compelling real-life "experiment," Fausto-Sterling points out that in 18 cases of prisoners chemically castrated for violent crimes in the '50s and '60s, nine of these men later died from violent confrontations after their release from prison. Although the castration obliterated their sex drive, it apparently didn't have much effect on their aggression.

And though there was some positive correlation in other studies, Fausto-Sterling issues the warning, often overlooked, that correlation does not imply causation. In other words, aggressive acts may help raise the level of testosterone in the blood, not the other way around. Another crack in the myth of the testosterone-pumped

warrior is a '70s research study showing that the stress of preparing for battle caused the testosterone level of U.S. soldiers to drop precipitously.

Psychologists most often think of aggression as an intention to inflict harm. The research on sex differences in aggression finds that, yes, a minority of men tend to act out their hostilities in physical ways more often than women do, especially when they've been taunted in some way. However, studies show that women, as a group, tend to use more psychological forms of aggression, such as verbal abuse or more elaborate schemes for revenge. Also, when asked, women will say they refrain from more physical acts because they're afraid of both the physical and social consequences, not because they wouldn't like to wallop someone now and again. And women do, in fact, get physical when their kids' safety is at stake.

Anthropologists, too, notably Eleanor Burke Leacock in *Myths of Male Dominance*, have had a field day with Goldberg's finding of male "dominance assertion" in every culture. Leacock reports on societies such as that of the Paliyans, forest hunters of India, where a strict egalitarianism between the sexes on matters of importance to both of them is observed. In some societies, hard for us to fathom, "striving for status" is not identical to "dominance" over other people, as Goldberg seems to suggest. In many hunter-gatherer societies, the man who is faster, stronger, braver or more intelligent than other men—and therefore manages to get more game—is given prestige only if he shares his spoils and is modest about his success.

Women in these societies are thought by many anthropologists to have an equal say in the decisions of the tribe. If testosterone levels are the cause of dominance, are men in certain societies particularly lacking? Or are there other social and economic imperatives that are more influential in the divvying up of status and power in a group?

Another story brought to mind by Memorial Day: My uncle Matt was a

quiet guy who took care of his handicapped daughter. In our brutal youth we sometimes made fun of him because of his shyness and passivity. The same behavior—the hovering attention to our needs, the quiet handling of his handicapped daughter—would probably have been read as "gentle" if he had been a woman, but at the time we thought he was just plain weird.

After he died, we saw pictures of a more confident-looking Matt. Our aunts told us other stories of him as a boy, how he used to be the leader: "All the boys would gather around Matt, and he would organize the games, or break up the fights. He was full of confidence; when he would walk down the street, gangs of boys would follow him."

We asked what happened, not really trusting our aunts' memories. They told us how he went to war when he was 20, full of the patriotism of that time. He was assigned to the signal corps, guiding the bombers off the ships and on toward their targets. When he got back home, he would look at all the pictures of the ravaged cities and towns of Europe, civilians maimed and killed. He sat in the attic for months, staring. My grandmother eventually coaxed him down, but in place of his confidence, there was more restraint. There was also a great deal of empathy.

The change wasn't temporary. But maybe if it were, or if Matt were a monkey and not a man, maybe then we could talk about stress lowering testosterone, leaving him "weak"—just like a woman. I prefer to think that something more human was involved, perhaps the painful acknowledgment of what unbridled dominance can bring. Now perhaps more often the province of women, this realization, too, can be a "manly" trait. But if we take Goldberg's point of view—as endorsed by Fisher—we risk losing sight of this. We also end up valorizing those socialized traits of men that keep our Memorial Days full of unhappy memories.

◀  
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# I N T H E A R T S

## Girlz n the hood

**Three summer movies—one of them re-released after two decades—struggle with the image of African-American women.**

By Pat Dowell

**T**he new generation of African-American filmmakers has its roots in a film about a woman—Spike Lee's 1986 debut feature, *She's Gotta Have It*. Nonetheless, the absence of credible women seems to be as much a defining flaw in black films as it is in white ones.

Every subsequent Spike Lee movie has baffled me anew with the brilliant writer-director's nagging inability to get out of the way of his own sketchy female creations. Right down to formidable Angela Bassett as Betty Shabazz in *Malcolm X*, Lee's female characters continue to exist largely as mirrors of manhood, charters of moral progress for their men, uncomprehending temptresses (if they're white) or gatekeepers of the culture (if they're black).

At least Lee, for all his stumbling, puts women in his movies who live and

breathe enough for you to remember them. It's hard to recall the female characters in *House Party*, *New Jack City*, *Posse*, *Chameleon Street* (which is otherwise a neglected masterpiece), or even *Boyz n the Hood*. Think of any Eddie Murphy movie, but especially *Boomerang*, to get an idea of the stereotypes—the mammy-to-be or the man-eater or, simply, the target of opportunity—black women fall into, even in black-directed movies.

Murphy's movies have women in them for the same reason white movies once had servile blacks in them—to demonstrate the protagonist's superiority, because he needs to conquer women. The whole comic point of *Boomerang*, even its title, is that he can't do that to Robin Givens.

Most of the new gangsta movies don't have time for women other than as decor. (See both Mario van Peebles efforts, *New Jack City* and *Posse*.) In this year's most praised African-American film, *Menace II Society*, the Hughes brothers (see *In These Times*, June 28) seem to draw their cinematic

lineage from the bloodsoaked Brian De Palma of *Scarface* and from virtuoso of violence Sam Peckinpah. It's a boyz' world they sculpt ingeniously with gunfire and gutter talk, in which the worst insult to a man is to call him a bitch.

In their testosterone-heavy story of one reluctant homey's fall, the Hughes brothers do make room for a female counterweight. Ronnie, played by Jada Pinkett, has already survived the loss of one lover (to prison), and her house serves as a cool, calm refuge for Caine (Tyron Turner) as he is nudged along the path to almost certain death by friends like the cheerful killer O-Dog (a hip-hop version of Joe Pesci's loose cannon in *Goodfellas*).

Ronnie gets a ticket out of South-Central, a job in Atlanta, and she wants to take Caine with her. She's a little more vivid than the average symbol, but symbol she is, a nurturer with a son. She functions not so much as a character, but as the alternative to blood on the pavement.

*Menace II Society* may be the critics' darling, but the No. 1 ticket-seller in America as I write is *Poetic Justice*. In this film, director John Sin-



**Menace II Society**  
Albert and Allen Hughes

**Poetic Justice**  
John Singleton

**Nothing But a Man**  
Michael Roemer

Original Cinema



Above: Abbey Lincoln in  
*Nothing But a Man*.  
Left: Jada Pinkett in  
*Menace II Society*.

gleton tries to top his own *Boyz N the Hood* by heading resolutely in the opposite direction, for a love story from the woman's point of view. Synthetically cute pop star Janet Jackson plays a survivor of South-Central, mourning her boyfriend's violent death with private poetry and hiding out in a hairdresser's job. On a joyriding blind date to Oakland with a couple of postal employees, she gradually falls in love with one of them, Lucky, played by Tupac Shakur.

*Boyz N the Hood* suggested that Singleton has an old-Hollywood sensibility and *Poetic Justice* confirms it. The movie is a little sappy, a little meandering, and it has the bad habit of resolving plot lines with melodramatic clichés (an untimely death, a fistfight, a lover's quarrel). It's an old movie romance, that, except for its working-class setting (a big exception, when you think about it), might have starred any two young white actors.

It deals in broader stereotypes than those currently in use for race, but it achieves something that seems to escape more politically schematic and urgent movies such as *Menace II Society*—it creates vivid, memorable individuals. Even Janet Jackson's Justice never settles for one stereotypical allotment of emotion. She's sexually reluctant, passionate,

dumb, smart, vain, but most of all, alive.

Of course, following Hollywood tradition, Justice is the good woman by contrast with a world of bad ones: Lucky's druggie ex-girlfriend and Justice's alcoholic best friend, just to name two. But for all its flaws, *Poetic Justice* gives African-American life a weighty ordinariness that's needed just as much as big-picture race politics in America's collective consciousness.

One movie that does captures both dimensions—everyday life for African Americans and the way it is deformed by racism—is *Nothing But a Man*. Made in 1964 by two white guys (director Michael Roemer and producer Robert M. Young) with a lot of black input, this American independent production was a festival prizewinner abroad. It received a standing ovation at the New York Film Festival, but no distribution outside of New York. It's getting a re-release this year, city by city.

Actors Ivan Dixon, now a television director, and Abbey Lincoln, better known as a jazz singer, shaped their characters and their dialogue. They play Duff and Josie, a railroad section worker and a preacher's daughter, whose courtship and marriage crosses class lines in the small Alabama town where they meet and settle down. Duff quietly resists the continuous, casual degradation of proprietary white onlookers who make it increasingly difficult for him to get a job. There's something

unserviceable about him, employers discover.

That's just what attracts Josie, a self-possessed woman with a tight-lipped smile. But Duff's personality has its downside too, in a simmering hostility that finds her a convenient target, and in a desire to bolt the domestic life that holds him in a town where he will always have to "make trouble."

Josie and Duff's relationship is as real, as nuanced, as full of complexities, as anything on the screen in 1964—more so, in fact—and nothing we see now from Hollywood, black or white, can match it. *Nothing But a Man* has an extraordinarily intense stillness about it that seems exotic in these days of empty action. It calls forth a devalued word, dignity, and it shows how little progress, how much backsliding, has taken place in making movies—about black and white, about male and female.

No African-American woman on the screen today is as humanly real as Josie, except for Chantel in the recent *Just Another Girl on the IRT* (see *In These Times*, April 19), the dynamic creation of director Leslie Harris, one of less than a handful of black female directors. Which just goes to show that the answer to the question of who will do justice to the black woman onscreen is probably the same one that white women are pondering. If you want the right thing done, you'll have to do it yourself. ◀



## I N P R I N T

## Virtual realities

By Kent Miller

**P**ity the poor blighters who build bridges, audit S&Cs, teach. The glam jobs of high technology, weaving silicon and electrons into tomorrow's utopia, are not for them. Never mind that the virtual reality/cyberspace/hypermedia/digital superhighway world of tomorrow has scant existence outside the pages of the glossy magazines. Never mind that even the most ardent chauvinists of high tech concede that it has little to offer to the denizens of South-Central L.A. and East Timor, let alone all those folk who can't program their VCRs. And mostly, never mind the growing fear that we are all losing our privacy to computer-mad government agencies, credit bureaus and the mail-order hydra.

Any decent, humane oppositional movement requires critical analysis of this brave new world. Unfortunately, three recent books suggest that the current state of the debate on technology is at worst evasive and at best resigned.

Aiming for big box office is *Game Over*, David Sheff's much-hyped story of the transformation of Nintendo from an old-fashioned maker of playing cards to the bane of parents worldwide. On the face of it, this is a tale that demands excursions into the psychology of entertainment, Japanese/US relations and such obsessions of '90s capitalism as total quality control. But Sheff personalizes these complexities as relentlessly as daytime TV. Here we find all the usual post-industrial archetypes: the tyrannical CEO, the workaholic junior exec, the gutsy entrepreneur, the canny lawyer, etc., etc., ad nauseum, as tedious and predictable as gunplay in a Western.

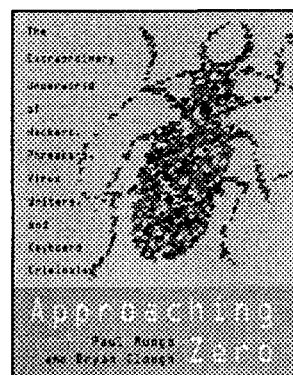
Success, in Sheff's world, is built on brains and the will to power. In Sheff's account, Nintendo Co. chairman Hiroshi Yamauchi is an imperious "genius" who sizes up upstart opponents over marathon games of Go. And ace lawyer

Howard Lincoln proves his manhood by besting none other than Thatcherite pimp Robert Maxwell himself in a struggle for the rights to the Soviet game "Tetris."

The result is business history for the sort of people convinced that the future of Russia depends on Bill liking Boris. *Game Over* is neither better nor worse than a zillion other recent tales of corporate triumph and, except for its particulars, is virtually identical to them. (Perhaps we should be thankful that the American talent for mass production is not completely defunct.) Beneath the hagiographic gloss and Sheff's straining but affectless prose, *Game Over* offers inadvertent evidence of why the American economy has come to its current sorry state. The glam boys here are the savvy marketers, shrewd lawyers and all-around deal-cutters who traffic in image and honeyed words. Whereas the men who actually *invent* the Nintendo equipment are scarcely to be seen after the first tenth of the book, and manual workers are as dead and gone as the gods of an extinct religion. In *Game Over*, all those Nintendo Entertainment Systems appear as if by spontaneous generation, and the pleasant myth that no one gets dirty fingernails in the post-industrial economy reproduces itself yet again.

Avoiding *Game Over*'s Clash of the Titans motif, *Approaching Zero* is a more modest and hence more pleasant effort. (Perhaps the authors, two Englishmen, have gained a wry detachment from the fact that they labor in a backwater of the Information Revolution.) The usual journalistic tommyrot aside (why is the First Cause of anything vaguely individualistic always "the '60s"?), it is refreshing to read an account of computer hackers and phone "phreaks" without the ominous maundering about imminent threats to Western civilization that normally mars reporting on such matters.

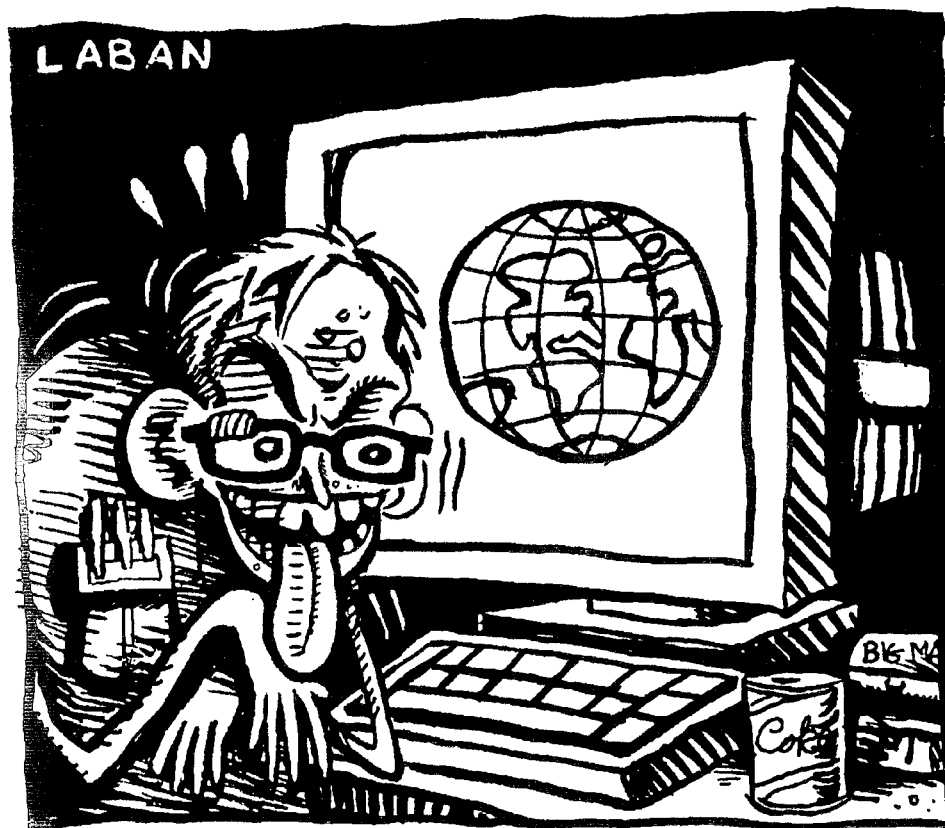
The electronic underground started with the decision by the Bell companies to automate in the early '60s. Soon, technically minded chaps figured out how to penetrate telephone networks. These phone



**Game Over:**  
**How Nintendo Zapped an American Industry, Captured Your Dollars, and Enslaved Your Children**  
By David Sheff  
Random House  
445 pp., \$25

**Approaching Zero:**  
**The Extraordinary Underworld of Hackers, Phreakers, Virus Writers, and Keyboard Criminals**  
By Paul Mungo and Bryan Clough  
Random House  
247 pp., \$22

**Technopoly:**  
**The Surrender of Culture to Technology**  
By Neil Postman  
Vintage Books  
222 pp., \$11



“phreaks” begat the current crop of computer hackers, who break into computers linked by telephone lines, implanting viruses, worms, trojan horses, logic bombs and whatever they come up with next.

In Mungo and Clough’s telling, the underground (and its watchers) reflect merely the latest iteration of that age-old symbiosis of cop and criminal. Just as J. Edgar Hoover made himself a hero by hyping a few hungry bank robbers into a nationwide crime wave, so the Secret Service and various other tentacles of the police state have whipped up hysteria over electronic warfare to cover a grab for the Constitution. Likewise, peddlers of security software cash in big by fanning fears of the Michelangelo virus and other such exotica, and media-savvy groups of hackers get lots of ink by giving themselves names like the Legion of Doom.

And, just as bohemia eerily mirrors the bourgeoisie, so the denizens of the electronic underground differ little from the prosperous nerds gushed over by the pillars of society. Anyone familiar with the early history of Microsoft will instantly recognize a downscale version in the Legion of Doom, whose mostly white, almost exclusively male members huddled over terminals late at night, chomping on pizza. If Bill Gates hadn’t been a rich kid at Harvard, he might be doing hard time right now instead of chairing Microsoft.

Oddly enough, the most ambitious virus writers today are not in America, but in the Third World and the former Soviet bloc, where talented programmers hold little hope of landing a job with Bill Gates. The reigning Professor Mori-

arty of virusdom is probably an unprepossessing Bulgarian who calls himself the Dark Avenger, the inventor of the Mutating Engine, a camouflaged, constantly altering mass of code that is utterly undetectable by any known anti-virus software. The Dark Avenger will probably generate lots of lucrative employment for Western security apparatchiks—proving once again that even though the Cold War is over, opportunities to make money off it are not.

If *Game Over* stuffs technology into the conventionalized narratives of business history, and *Approaching Zero* offers a limited (if engaging) portrait of a technological subculture, Neil Postman, in *Technopoly*, asks the Big Questions about the implications of it all. Why, he wonders, should we be so intoxicated by the wonders of technology? In a thoughtful discussion that ranges over subjects as

varied as the telescope, letter grades and CAT scans, Postman shows how each new technology has winners and losers, and how the losers are gradually persuaded that they are actually winners. This gloomy history terminates in technopoly, where the only values are efficiency, quantification and control.

The United States is the first and still the only technopoly, or, as Postman writes, “totalitarian technocracy”—a soulless landscape where people talk about the need to “reprogram” themselves, polls pulverize thought and the only point of an education is to get a better job.

All this is interesting, if a bit familiar. But unfortunately, the good professor merits only a gentleman’s C in Activism 101. He concludes by offering the “loving resistance fighter” a list of principles that includes family values and a willingness to suspect technology. An honorable, old-fashioned list, but also a list that suggests why Postman is one of the most popular social critics in an age of lowered expectations. His we’re-in-it-all-together ethos, coupled with his calls for privatized resistance, provide the sensitive reader with brief solace but are unlikely to disturb the relentless march into robohood.

Ultimately, his kind of criticism, like Sheff’s business hagiography, actually flatters its readers, who can congratulate themselves on reading a book instead of playing “The Legend of Zelda.”

Kent Miller is a playwright and technical writer living in Seattle.

# John Wayne's World

By H. Bruce Franklin

**G**unfighter Nation, the final volume of Richard Slotkin's monumental trilogy on the myth of the frontier in America, is the culmination of a 20-year project already recognized as one of the most formidable and influential achievements in the field of cultural history. For Slotkin's audacious goal is to display the five-century history of what he perceives as the myth central to forming the ideology of the nation that calls itself America.

The first volume, *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860*, appeared in 1973, the year the U.S. capitulated in the Vietnam War. In fact, Slotkin's bold reconceptualization of America's mythic self-image was itself a product of the Vietnam War, part of the radical transformation of America's consciousness.

Like most thinking Americans during this period, many historians and humanists found themselves forced by the war to re-examine both their received ideological assumptions and their entire vision of America's history and culture. Many who began with the naive belief that the Vietnam War was an aberration, some kind of wayward "mistake" by a nation long leading the world's march to progress, discovered instead that the war actually typified the nation's history from colonial settler regime to global empire.

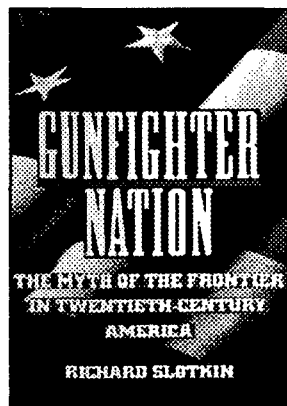
In the process of reassessing that history, they also discovered how much their own historical vision had been shaped by ideological demands dating from the nation's for-

mation and persisting through the Cold War.

Most obviously, both the conduct of the Vietnam War and the justification for it bore inescapable resemblances to the genesis of "America" in the genocidal wars against the "Indians." GIs even called Vietnam "Injun country." And students of American literature watching "Zippo squads" torching Vietnamese villages might feel like the protagonist of Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown" when Satan tells him "it was I that brought your father a pitch-pine knot, kindled at my own hearth, to set fire to an Indian village."

So in the first volume of his trilogy, Slotkin went back to the beginning, exploring how the frontier myth was formed, how it forged a distinctive national consciousness, and how it evolved until "the myth of regeneration through violence became the structuring metaphor of the American experience." In the second volume, *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800-1890* (1985), Slotkin showed how the frontier myth metamorphosed in the 19th century to sanctify not only the continued transcontinental march of violence against the "Indians" but also the violence evoked to repress those other "savages"—blacks and the urban proletariat—also impeding the progress of civilization. *Gunfighter Nation* takes the story of the frontier myth from the emergence of American global imperialism in the 1890s into the Vietnam War and its aftermath.

The title is all too apt: *Gunfighter Nation* is in part the story of how America matured into its own image as that ambiguously heroic figure, the gunfighter, the lone professional whose whole existence comes to be defined by the use of his deadly skills and firepower.



**Gunfighter Nation:  
The Myth of the Frontier  
in Twentieth-Century  
America**

By Richard Slotkin  
Atheneum  
850 pp., \$40

But the significance of the title does not really hit home until Slotkin demonstrates, in one of the most insightful sections of the book, how this image itself was invented and defined by Hollywood Westerns in the early '50s as part of the culture of the Cold War. The actual "hired guns" of the Old West killed "from ambush or under cover of a vigilante expedition," and they were "variously (and properly) described as 'mercenaries' and 'banditti' or as 'regulators' and 'vigilantes.'" As Slotkin explains, "The image of the gunfighter as a professional of violence, for whom formalized killing was a calling and even an art, is the invention of movies like *The Gunfighter* (1950), the reflection of Cold





War-era ideas about professionalism and violence and not of the mores of the Old West." The Western movies of this period reflect and express Washington's development of an ideology to legitimize, and a killer elite to execute, the dirtiest business of its Cold War empire.

Just as fabricated as Hollywood's gunfighter, Slotkin argues, is the mythic frontier itself. Even in the 19th century, very few Americans actually experienced frontier life. By the 1890s, the frontier had become "mythic space," and it was within this land of the imagination that Frederick Jackson Turner presented his seminal thesis on "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" in an address delivered in "the composed landscape" of Chicago's World's Columbian Exposition of 1893.

Slotkin counterposes to Turner's "populist" thesis a less discussed but even more influential thesis on the closing of the American frontier—Theodore Roosevelt's "progressive" argument, developed in his four-volume *The Winning of the West* (1889-1896) and expressed most tellingly in speeches and writings just after the Spanish-American War. For Roosevelt, the advance of civilization depended on the global ascendancy of what he called the Anglo-Saxon race as it had triumphed on the now-closed American frontier: led by a fighting elite, celebrating manly virtues and keeping women in their proper domestic roles. Progress, Roosevelt argued, is "due solely to the power of the mighty civilized

racess which have not lost the fighting instinct, and which by their expansion are gradually bringing peace to the red wastes where the barbarian peoples of the world hold sway." And so the 20th-century destiny of the United States must be an imperialism that transforms its own frontier from continental to global.

As Slotkin sweeps through the formative texts of the 20th-century version of the frontier myth—elucidating the evolution from the Wild West show, Western romances, dime novels and the fantasies of Edgar Rice Burroughs into Hollywood's dream factory—he demonstrates that Roosevelt's influence is "paramount" in "the realm of mass-culture mythology." Most impressive is his rich and deeply layered explication of the mass-culture artifacts that serve as his texts, especially the dozens of Hollywood Westerns whose metamorphoses expressed and influenced the national consciousness as America moved from the Depression through World War II and the Cold War into Vietnam and its aftermath.

To be a virtuoso critic of any genre, one has to be in tune with it; without feeling its resonances, one cannot understand what (or how) it means. Slotkin is obviously captivated by Western movies, and this is what makes his readings of them so deeply insightful. Occasionally, however, his love-hate relation with the Western leaves him somewhat too codependent on its most characteristic modes and sur-

prisingly unsympathetic to revisionist and counterculture Westerns, whose own ideological viewpoint, ironically, is closer to his own. (He refers to the anti-imperialist and antiracist *Soldier Blue* as “scandalously successful.”)

Slotkin’s intense engagement with John Ford leads both to a complex, nuanced reading of *The Searchers* and to disparagement of those who stress its racist images and effects as committing “a misreading that is opposite to the author’s intent.” But even an artifact composed by a single writer, such as a poem or novel, “means” more than the author’s intent, which itself is hardly unambiguous. To suggest that a movie—created by hundreds of individuals and at least one corporation, designed to be mass marketed for commercial purposes, and presenting a multimedia mix of sights, sounds and words—means only what the director intended is carrying the *auteur* theory of moviemaking into absurdity.

As Slotkin pungently observes, it’s hard to demystify the gunfighter/Indian-fighter hero if you cast John Wayne as the hero. Whatever Ford intended, the role is “re-absorbed into the ongoing life of John Wayne-as-movie-star and becomes part of an ever-growing heroic persona that would finally make Wayne a ‘living legend,’ a cultural symbol whose role in public mythology is akin to that of figures like Daniel Boone, Davy Crockett and Buffalo Bill,” “a role that became an essential element in the heroic style and public image of America’s counterinsurgency warriors.”

As cultural history, *Gunfighter Nation* casts dazzling light on the psychosocial significance of some of late 20th-century America’s main icons, including John F. Kennedy, embodiment of the “New Frontier,” and Ronald Reagan, apostle of the “High Frontier.” But the book is far less successful as political history. Slotkin is a splendid reader of primary “texts,” including films and other kinds of shows. But in reconstructing the political half of the dialectic, he relies too heavily on secondary texts, many of which are not judiciously chosen, leading to dubious analysis and even frequent factual errors.

Slotkin’s analysis of two crucial events—the origin of the Cold War and the genesis of the Vietnam War—are based on flawed chronology and echo Cold War apologetics. According to Slotkin, after World War II the U.S. “armed forces were demobilized with astonishing and perhaps excessive speed.” Then “Russia’s acquisition of atomic weapons in 1947 [sic]” convinced America’s leaders that “peace could not be achieved by American withdrawal behind the shield of oceans,” but only by maintaining the Western alliance. Along with Communist gains in Europe, “the success of the Communist revolution in China and the outbreak of rebellions in the Asian and African colonies of France, England and the Netherlands suggested that the Communist threat might be worldwide. In the spring of 1947 the Truman administration responded with the articulation of the ‘Truman Doctrine’ and the establishment of the Marshall Plan.”

This chronology reverses cause and effect. Rather than demobilizing after World War II, the U.S. surrounded the

Soviet Union with a noose of bases for nuclear bombers. In 1946 it tested advanced nuclear weapons in Bikini, activated the first intercontinental bomber and began development of the intercontinental ballistic missile. Both the Chinese revolution and the Soviet bomb came in 1949, two years *after* the articulation of the Truman Doctrine.

In 1946, even before the enunciation of the Truman Doctrine, the U.S. began its proxy war against Vietnam, providing ships, weapons, and the finances for France’s eight-year effort to re-establish the colonial regime it had lost during World War II. Slotkin’s chronology of the direct U.S. participation in hostilities against Vietnam that followed this proxy war accepts the official line that it began as an attempt to “aid” the government of Ngo Dinh Diem; he fails to recognize that the United States *installed* Diem as a puppet leader during the 1954 Geneva Conference and that Col. Edward Lansdale began covert military operations, even within Hanoi itself, in 1954. (Slotkin has Lansdale arriving in 1956.)

A more accurate narrative would actually strengthen Slotkin’s argument about the development and significance of the Cold War Western, for his key political text is the Doolittle Report of 1954, which revised the CIA’s charter and defined America’s Cold War role.

“If the United States is to survive,” the report stated, “[w]e must learn to subvert, sabotage and destroy our enemies by more clever, more sophisticated and more effective methods than those used against us. It may become necessary that the American people be made acquainted with, understand and support this fundamentally repugnant philosophy.”

As Slotkin most insightfully shows, this doctrine updated the ideology of the “savage war” conducted against the “Indians” for use in counterinsurgency in Indochina and elsewhere in the Third World, and thus also provided both matrix and motivation for Hollywood’s evolving visions of the Vietnam War.

As might be expected, the grand climax of Slotkin’s 20-year project begins as *Gunfighter Nation* reaches the point when the Vietnam War begins to shake America’s cultural foundations. In the aftermath of Vietnam, the profound truth of his main argument was dramatized when President George Bush, exulting over the great “victory” in the Persian Gulf, boasted to a nation gaily festooned in yellow ribbons, “By God, we’ve kicked the Vietnam syndrome once and for all.” As Slotkin writes, “By treating the Gulf War as a ritual of redemption through violence ... Bush asks us to conceive our political and moral priorities in *exclusively* mythic terms. ... [T]he president authorizes the shedding of blood ... as a cure for the illness of our imagination.” Indeed, how could a cultural historian receive a more revealing—or more horrifying—proof of his thesis? ◀

H. Bruce Franklin is the John Cotton Dana Professor of English and American Studies at Rutgers University in Newark and the author, most recently, of *M.I.A. or Mythmaking in America* (Lawrence Hill).



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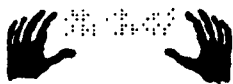
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*Dora & Jack Rabinoff,  
Joe Rapoport  
I remember  
-Sheva*

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Continued from page 40

"Of course, the genetic information was not complete, so we have had to supplement it with DNA from living Orthoptera—cockroaches. And from that, professor, we have reconstructed some of the famous Homo sapiens who used to walk this earth before stretch limos, muggers and Metrorail made pedestrians extinct."

After negotiating a 99-year lease, Hammond had stocked the Mall with clones of departed local fauna, people who once roamed Washington the way Tyrannosaurus Rex roamed the Mesozoic. James Madison, Robert La Follette, Frederick Douglas, Daniel Webster and Wayne Morse now populated the verdant meadows of our nation's capital. I was convinced that Potomac Park was brilliant in both conception and execution. Who would not rejoice at this triumph of human and urban renewal?

It is true that not every one of Hammond's recycled pols was as harmless as those I first encountered. In a corner of the Mall, secluded and

secured by an electric fence, were placed the scoundrels of American history, individuals whose evil would live after them, if only they would cease to live. Alive again were Joe McCarthy, Mitchell Palmer, J. Edgar Hoover, Albert Fall and William Casey. Though they hissed at you from behind the wire, armed guards kept these miscreants from causing any further harm. They were as vital as Ernest Gruening and Jeanette Rankin to the lessons you could learn during a visit to Potomac Park.

"Don't count on it," cautioned Ian Malcolm, who had just joined us. Malcolm was a chaos theorist hired by Hammond to scoff. "If something can go wrong, it will. Remember Vietnam, the Bay of Pigs, Classic Coke."

He was right. While we spoke, Washington was starting to burn. Under the cover of dense smoke, George Armstrong Custer had overpowered his guards and was cutting a hole in the fence for William Tecumseh Sherman. The rogues would soon be rampant. But they were not the arson-

ists. It turns out that some of the blood in the Willard's entomological compote belonged to hostile British soldiers who had set fire to Washington in 1814. When Hammond's biotechnicians cloned their DNA, the redcoats picked up where they had left off.

The U.S. capital was again in flames, and everyone at Potomac Park, whether a native of the 20th century or born again, was in panic. Hammond's dream of a flesh-and-blood history text had become a bloody mess. And, though I tried to imagine reconstructing the park, I knew that henceforth Hammond would be as popular in these parts as an ethics bill.

The project, like the federal district, would be a total loss. But meanwhile, all the ice cream in D.C. was melting anyway, so I sat there on the grass, sharing great, gooey gobs of rocky road with John Foster Dulles and Dolley Madison.

Steven G. Kellman is a professor of comparative literature at the University of Texas at San Antonio. He is a film critic for the *Texas Observer*.



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**IN THE END**

# Potomac Park

By Steven G. Kellman

**L**et Six Flags and Disney eat their corporate hearts out," declared John Hammond. I was standing behind the U.S. Capitol with Hammond, as he looked proudly down the Mall toward the Washington Monument. He had recently converted the area into Potomac Park, a state-of-the-art theme amusement center.

"This is bound to reap billions," said Hammond. "Who cannot recite the Declaration of Independence, and who would not pay \$75—credit card or traveler's check—to speak with its author?"

As if on cue, if not on payroll, Thomas Jefferson himself strode up and shook my hand.

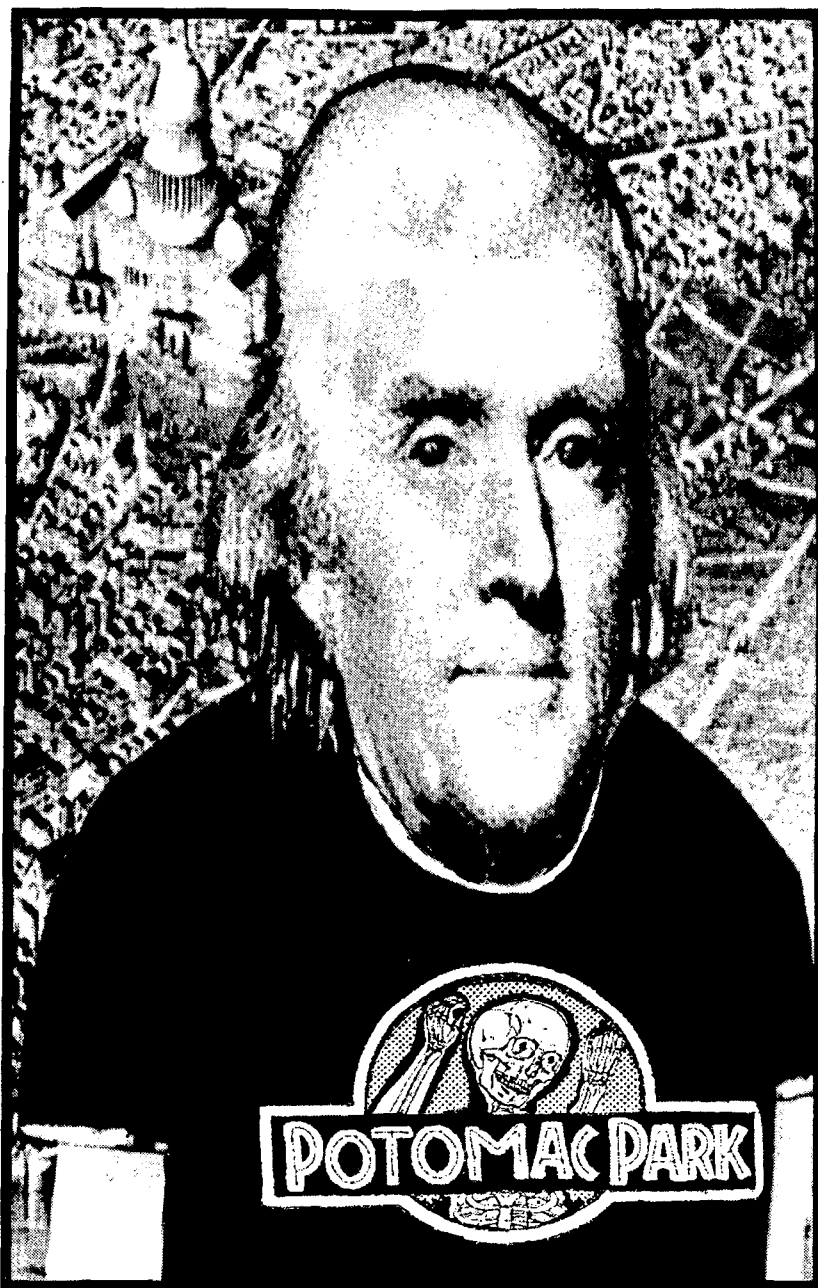
"Didn't you mean 'inalienable' rather than 'unalienable'?" I asked, but the maven of Monticello was already darting off in the direction of the Lincoln Memorial. What would he say to the Great Emancipator? For that matter, what would I say, now that I could tug old Abe's beard and warn him about actors?

You can imagine how all this felt for me, one of the world's leading specialists on political fossils. Hammond had tracked me down at a trailer park in Fairfield, Vt., where I was editing the Guiteau-Arthur letters. Declaring, "You're the best historian money can buy," he had asked me to come to Washington and serve as a consultant on his new venture. I had agreed to do so after he promised to fund my next book project, *Inside the Beltway: A Comparative Cholesterol Count for William Howard Taft in the White House and on the Supreme Court*.

A few days later, there I was, beholding a gentle flock of Supreme Court justices browsing beside the reflecting pool. Their black robes flapping in the breeze, John Marshall, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Hugo Black, Earl Warren and Louis Brandeis offered a spectacle of sagaci-

ty, a vista guaranteed to inspire any native child with proper awe for the sanctity of law.

Hammond looked on proudly. "I guess you're wondering how I did it," he said. "Well, before the Freon Age, before the advent of the Orkin Man, mammoth mosquitoes patrolled the banks of the Potomac. Some of these suckers were found in a bar at the Willard Hotel, preserved in a barrel of booze. The pickled parasites still contained the blood of their victims, prominent pols who had long since gulped their last swig at the Willard. My scientists have been able to extract the blood from the abdomens of these lifeless bugs, and, from it, to reassemble the DNA of juicy humans they had feasted on.



*Continued on page 39*